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BEATON'S BARGAIN.

By MRS. ALEXANDER.

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BEATON'S BARGAIN.

CHAPTER I.

"SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT."

THE play was nearly over.

The house, crowded by a brilliant audience, resounded with frequent applause. Irving and Miss Terry had been at their best in "Much Ado about Nothing."

"She is certainly charming," said a slight elegant woman, with large dark eyes and an exquisitely becoming toilet, who sat facing the stage in a private box. "How very delightful it must be to make a lot of money by being fascinating and wearing lovely dresses!"

"I fancy there was a background of grinding and waiting before Miss Terry could produce this highly finished, highly paid performance," returned a gentleman, who was leaning on the back of a chair, a tall, thin, distinguished-looking man, with thick sandy mustaches, and hair a shade darker, straight handsome features, and light smiling eyes. "All intense pleasure must be costly; but then one does not count the cost."

"*You* do not, I'm sure!" she replied, looking up to him with a smile.

"Perhaps not; but the cost discounts *me*."

"How horrid realities are! Give me my cloak. Jean, let us wrap up and be ready. What is she looking at, Mr. Beaton?"

The lady she addressed had been for more than a minute

gazing through her opera-glass at some person or persons in the undress circle opposite, and now, turning to Beaton, she handed the glass to him.

"I wish," she said, "you would look at that man who is leaning against the pillar behind a huge woman in a green bonnet. I really believe it is Jack Maitland."

"I dare say it is. He is in town, I know," taking the glass and looking as she directed. "Yes," he said, "it is Maitland; you have a good memory, Jean."

"Oh, Mrs. Winington has no end of a memory," said a stout, short young man, ruddy and fair-haired, who had not spoken before.

"It is a long time since I saw Jack Maitland, and he is a good deal changed. Why did you not bring him to see me?"

"I never thought of it," said Beaton.

"Well, find him out now, like a good boy, and bring him to supper."

"Oh, we will meet him going out."

"No, no; make sure of him; you have seen all this a dozen times. Go now!"

Beaton raised his eyebrows, put on an air of submission, and left the box.

"You have a very obedient brother, Jean," said the first speaker.

"Every one obeys Mrs. Winington, Lady Mary," remarked the stout young man.

"Except Colonel Winington," cried Lady Mary.

"That of course. *I* promised to obey him," said Mrs. Winington, a smile parting her ripe red lips, and showing the white regular teeth within. She was on a larger scale than her friend, tall and stately, with a grandly rounded figure, snowy arms and throat, so far as a square corsage and elbow-sleeves permitted them to be seen, a richly pale complexion, with a tiny freckle or two where the sun had kissed her cheek too fondly, abundant real chestnut hair,

and soft warm brown eyes. She was a handsome likeness of her brother, Leslie Beaton, with more vitality.

"Hush!" said Lady Mary, "you have no enthusiasm for the drama."

"Come!" exclaimed Mrs. Winington; "we know the rest. Let us get out before the crowd. Mr. Smythe, you can find the brougham, and Leslie must come on the best way he can; I do hope he will catch Jack Maitland."

Mr. Smythe was most active and energetic. He soon discovered Mrs. Winington's tall footman. Between them, that lady's perfectly appointed brougham was quickly brought up, and the owner with her fair friend carefully handed in by the devoted Smythe.

"I shall be at home to-morrow; come and have a cup of tear at five o'clock. Good-night," said Mrs. Winington, as she drew up the window, and they rolled off.

"What a shame not to ask the poor little fellow to supper!" said Lady Mary. "He really earns his bread (his bread of life) very hardly."

"Pooh!" returned Mrs. Winington; "four are company, five an unpleasant solitude;" and she nestled herself into her corner of the luxurious conveyance. "Besides, I have given him his guerdon; tea with us is payment in full. I do not want him to-night."

"Oh, it is to be a double *tête-à-tête?* As you like. But who is this mysterious Jack Maitland, who shrouds himself in the obscurity of the upper boxes?"

"Jack Maitland," said Mrs. Winington, slowly, "is the son of our factor, or what you English people would term 'agent,' to my father's estate. He was my first—well, nearly my love."

"Your first love! Then you could scarcely have been short-coated; and you remember him! This is interesting."

"I assure you *he* was very interesting, and so desperately

in earnest. He was ready to brave the wrath of all the Beatons if I would only run away with him."

"What! did he dare so much? and only the son of an *employé!*"

"Oh, the Maitlands are of a good old stock. His father and mine were brother officers. Jack is a gentleman by birth and breeding, only the proposition was so absurd. I answered it by marrying Colonel Winington."

"A very wise solution. What a nuisance it is, Jean, that nice men never have any money!"

"Well, rarely."

"And where has your young hero been hiding himself?"

"I haven't an idea. He was a medical student in Edinburgh, but he broke away, and went to America or New Zealand or Timbuctoo; in short he was in disgrace with his father, with every one, so we quite lost sight of him."

"Ah! I suppose remorse for having ruined his life presses on your soul."

"Indeed it does not. Jack Maitland would have had to sow his wild oats whether he had known Jean Beaton or not; but he was a delightful boy, as I considered him, though he is two years older than I am."

"I feel curious to see this young Lochinvar," said Lady Mary, yawning. "What are we to have for supper? I begin to be hungry."

"I scarcely know. The usual sort of thing, I suppose."

"My dear, with your means you should aim at *un*common things. Your good appetite, Jean, is a misfortune; it blunts the delicacy of your gastronomic perceptions. I like only extra nice things."

A little more disjointed talk brought them to Mrs. Winington's house in South Kensington.

The double doors were thrown open by a watchful butler before the bell ceased to sound. Mrs. Winington and her guest crossed a square, carpeted hall, richly colored and fragrant with the flowers which decorated it, to a small ante

or morning-room, dimly lighted, where a wood-fire burned on a low hearth. An open door opposite showed the dining-room, where supper was laid.

"Really the fire is quite nice, though it is nearly the end of April," said Lady Mary, throwing off her wraps.

"I find it too warm," returned Mrs. Winington, taking a fanciful match-box from the mantel-piece, and lighting the candles in the girandoles at each side of the glass. She looked steadily at her own image for a minute, and then turned away with a slight smile.

"You think you'll do?" asked Lady Mary, who had been watching her lazily. "Is young Lochinvar to be immolated over again?"

Mrs. Winington laughed, a pleasant joyous laugh.

"Certainly not; but I am glad my old admirer will not be able to say, 'Poor Jeanie is awfully gone off.' Six or seven years are something of a trial to the best complexion, added to late hours and a rapid rate of living."

"Too true!" cried Lady Mary earnestly. "You make me shiver. Here am I, a destitute widow for more than two years, and I have only enjoyed, not improved the shining hour. I really must find some good parti *this* season, or—"

"I hear a cab or something stop," interrupted Mrs. Winington quickly. "Come, let us not seem to have waited for them."

But she had not yet taken her seat when "Mr. Beaton," "Mr. Maitland," were announced, and she went forward to greet her early lover—a strikingly beautiful figure, clad in exceedingly ornamental and becoming mourning.

"After long years!" she said, holding out her fair ungloved hand, with a soft smile. "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Maitland."

Jack Maitland was not so tall as her brother, but broader, and more largely built. He was dark, either naturally or from exposure, with nearly black hair, and

deep gray steady eyes. His square jaw and well-cut mouth were undisguised by beard or mustache, and though at a disadvantage in his unstudied morning dress, there was a certain dignity of strength in his figure and movements which also gave him the air of being older than he really was.

"You are very good to give me this pleasure," replied Maitland, holding her hand for just a second, and looking observantly at her, while a bright answering smile lighted up his face and showed teeth white as her own. "I was most agreeably surprised when Leslie brought me your invitation."

"Which I could hardly persuade him to accept," said Beaton; "some wretched scruple about being in morning dress, unworthy of a backwoodsman, made him hesitate."

"Not for long," said Maitland, taking the place beside his hostess to which she motioned him.

"I should never have forgiven you had you refused," said Mrs. Winington. "But I have neglected my duty. Let me introduce my old friend and playfellow to you, Lady Mary. "Mr. Maitland, Lady Mary Hay."

"Better and more distinctively known as Bonnie Mary Hay," said Beaton.

"Now *did* you think it necessary to say that?" asked Lady Mary, opening her big tragic eyes. "Do pray give me some mayonaise; it is commonplace, but nice." And the well-assorted party applied themselves to the good things provided.

"To auld lang syne," said the hostess, with a merry glance at her right-hand neighbor, as she raised her glass to her lips.

He bowed, drained his silently, and then asked, "How is Colonel Winington?"

"He is quite well, I hope. Perhaps you think I ought not to have a supper party without him? Pray remember it is a family affair. I have my brother's august protec-

tion. Lady Mary is Colonel Winington's cousin, and *you*" —turning her soft smiling eyes full upon his—"almost belong to us." Maitland returned her glance with an expression of irrepressible admiration, but did not speak. "My husband," she continued, "is away at Claughton. He has a racing establishment there, and is always going to and fro; the turf is *his* world. I hope to introduce you to him on his return."

"Thank you. I shall not be much longer in town."

"Oh, you must not run away at the first flush of the season; really London is very delightful for a short time."

Then, with a few well put queries, she drew from him an outline of his life since they parted. Some years wandering unsuccessfully in Canada and South Africa, a few more of better promise on a New Zealand farm, then a summons from his father, whose increasing years made help in the varied duties of the factorship very needful. "And of course since the laird—" He paused in his speech.

"Yes," put in Mrs. Winington softly, with an air of interest; "since my poor father died?"

"There has been more to do than ever, the young laird being a minor. Now there is a railway bill for a line between Strathkinness and Ardentinny which they are trying to pass, and I have been summoned to give evidence before the committee. I am afraid it will be a tedious affair."

"It is unfortunate for Mr. Beaton that his elder brother was so foolish as to marry. But for this poor little two-year-old, you would be 'Beaton of Craigrothie,' and a good match," cried Lady Mary, laughing.

"Instead of being obliged to look out for a good match myself. If you promise me your ladyship's fair hand, I will post off to Scotland to-morrow, and poison the intrusive imp," said Beaton. "Maitland there will not inform the police, for the sake of old friendship. Eh, Jack!"

"Oh, Mr. Beaton," exclaimed Lady Mary, "I saw the very thing that would suit you in the 'Times' this morn-

ing. I told you at the time, Jean. Oh, where is the paper? Ring the bell, Mr. Maitland, please." (The servants by this time had retired.) "It was in yesterday's paper, too, but I did not think about it seriously till to-day. I am quite in earnest. Pray bring me this day's 'Times;' I left it in the library. I do hope it is not sent away." (This to the servant.) "I only want the advertisement sheet."

"What may this wonderful find be?" exclaimed Beaton.

"What may retrieve your fortunes," said Lady Mary solemnly.

"They never wanted retrieving more. Haste! oh, haste, most admirable Miller, with the means of my salvation!"

The stately butler re-entered as he spoke, and handed the "Times" to Lady Mary.

"It is a tremendous effort to hunt up anything in these endless columns," she exclaimed, stretching out the wide sheet. "Do hold this side, Mr. Beaton, it is for your sake I am incurring the fatigue. Oh, here, here it is, in the agony column. 'The friends of a young lady of considerable fortune, who have few social opportunities, would be glad to communicate with a gentleman of character and position with a view to matrimonial alliance. Fullest information given and expected. Strictest secrecy observed. Address by letter only to A. X. Z., Box 24, P. O. Lombard Street."

"By Mammon! this is a chance. Lombard Street smacks of gold," cried Beaton, taking the paper. "But if the young lady has the needful, why this necessity of hunting for a husband?"

"They must be very extraordinary people to confess to having few social advantages. I wonder is she a lunatic?" said Mrs. Winington.

"Box 24 will be tolerably crammed full by to-morrow," said Maitland, laughing.

"They are not 'suited' yet," observed Lady Mary gravely, "or the advertisement would not be out again."

"I wonder if there really is a good fortune behind this queer announcement, because I am really hard up. I was just able to clear myself when the poor old laird died, and now I feel quite poverty-stricken and cold without my debts. Besides, the children of Israel are rather hard-fisted to the fatherless, when they realize there is no longer a paternal purse to pull at. I give you my word I feel as destitute as—"

"As I am," put in Lady Mary. "I am sure if any young or old gentleman of considerable fortune was so deprived of social advantages as to feel obliged to advertise for a wife, I should answer and find out if the game were worth the candle."

"I am sure you would do nothing of the kind," said Beaton, with a peculiar expression, half admiring, half reproachful. "You know you are the most difficult of women. Moreover, for the matrimonial stakes a man can hedge his book as *you* can not. However, I am grateful enough for the trouble you have taken to follow your advice." He drew out a note-book and pencil and took down the initials and address, observing, "I will write to-morrow."

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Winington. "I will accept no sister-in-law out of the 'Times' agony column."

"Suppose she has a hundred thousand recommendations," said Maitland.

"That would be irresistible; but a hundred thousand pounds do not go a-begging in the 'Times.'"

"Now, Lady Mary, if you have supped you must complete your friendly offices by assisting me to open negotiations in this very commercial transaction. You must help me to do myself justice, for I distrust my own descriptive powers. There are pens, ink, and paper in the next room,

and we will submit our joint production to a committee of the whole house."

"Very well; I will tone down the brilliancy of your coloring, and give an air of reality to your inventions," said Lady Mary, rising, and leading the way into the anteroom.

"Leslie is much the same as ever," said Mrs. Winington in a confidential tone to Maitland, as soon as they were left alone. "Poor fellow, he has given us great trouble and anxiety. I am sure it is well for the family fortunes that Archie left a son. Leslie never knew the value of money. Do you remember he was always borrowing yours, when you were boys, and I fear rarely paid you back?"

"I imagine my loans were infinitesimal, and I am quite sure I got my cash returned, or I should have been penniless. Yes, your brother is just the same pleasant fellow as ever. I wish he were a little more prudent."

"You were not always prudent yourself, Jack—I mean Mr. Maitland," returned Mrs. Winnington, looking full into his eyes for a moment, and then letting her own slowly droop.

"No," said Maitland, laughing, a pleasant unembarrassed laugh. "I was as great a fool as lads generally are, if not a greater fool. It is wonderful what enormous proportions one's early follies assume when seen by the light of maturer experience."

"Ah! and you have grown quite, quite wise *now*," with some emphasis, her eyes still downcast, as she turned a heavy gold Indian bracelet round and round on her arm.

"Quite wise! I wish I could think so. A trifle surer and more deliberate."

"And so have I—grown *much* wiser, much more enlightened in some directions," with a quick, deep sigh. "We ought to be good friends now that we have left our follies far behind. Ought we not, Mr. Maitland?"

"Who would be anything but your friend, Mrs. Winington?"

She looked up; their eyes met. Hers were inexpressibly imploring. His, quiet, searching, not unkindly, but she saw, she felt he was perfectly unmoved. She was no longer the Jean Beaton for whose kiss he would have risked his life, only Mrs. Winington, a handsome, agreeable woman, with whom it was pleasant to while away an hour. She had rarely been so discomfited. Her brow darkened; she bent over the flowers that lay beside her plate, to hide the change she felt transforming her face.

"Tell me," she resumed, recovering herself, "how long is it since you have returned?"

"About a year."

"But you will not always bury yourself alive in the wilds of Craigrothie."

"Why not? I have no particular ambition. Having no special profession, I must do what I can, and to manage a large estate, develop its resources, and improve the tenantry, is no bad occupation for a man's life. My father is very much broken, and eventually I don't think the guardians or trustees will appoint any one in my place."

"They would be very foolish if they did. And you are content to live and die at Craigrothie?"

"At present, yes. Home is very pleasant after wandering about for years."

"You are too young to feel that. Perhaps some bonnie lassie with golden locks is the real attraction to the old place; perhaps you are going to follow *my* good example, and take a partner for life."

Jack Maitland smiled a somewhat grim smile.

"I am by no means inclined to matrimony," he said. "When I am older and more talkative and stay-at-home, I may look out for a good housewife to make my declining years comfortable, but for the present no!" There was a world of imperative rejection in his "no."

"You are a good deal changed," said Mrs. Winington, softly, almost timidly.

"I see a change in you too," he returned, looking at her steadily, as a man might contemplate a picture; "but you are even handsomer, I should say lovelier than you used to be." A certain familiarity had come into his tone as he talked, and Mrs. Winington, as she met his eyes, felt that it would not be easy to pierce the panoply of his indifference.

"I fear you are hard and unforgiving," she murmured.

"You wrong me, I have no right to be either." Then, with the bright frank smile which lit up his face so pleasantly, "I assure you, I have grown a very easy-going, unheroic fellow since time and social friction have worn down my rough edges."

"You used not to be rough, Jack; you were very, very gentle to me at least."

"Very good of you to say so. I fancy I was something of a boor, or would have been, if I had not known you."

"I wish I could believe I had ever done you any good, Jack."

"Yes, you did; you taught me a great deal," laughing.

"Well," resumed Mrs. Winington, after a short pause, "you must come and dine with us. I want to introduce you to Colonel Winington. You know he is one of my father's executors; it would be well if you became friends. How long shall you be in town?"

"It is impossible to say. I may be called before the committee to-morrow. I may be kept kicking my heels here for a couple of weeks, or a month."

"Here," cried Lady Mary, coming in with a sheet of paper in her hand, "here is a magnificent composition. Pray listen." She seated herself at the table, while Beaton, who followed, leaned on the back of her chair.

"Having seen A. X. Z.'s advertisement, I beg to offer myself as a candidate for the matrimonial alliance proposed.

I am a man of good family, assured social position, and attractive appearance. I attained my thirty-first year on the eighteenth of February last. My character will bear the strictest investigation, and my references are unexceptionable. My fortune is, I regret to say, *nil*, but, wonderful to relate, I am free from debt. If A. X. Z. will consent to a private interview, I shall be happy to satisfy him on all points, and make any arrangement calculated to give satisfaction. Nature has endowed me with a warm heart and an affectionate disposition, which are entirely at the command of the lady who will be so good as to share her fortune with yours, etc., etc.

"JOCK O' HAZLEDEAN."

"First-rate! bravo!" cried Mrs. Winington, clapping her hands.

"Enough to lure the birds from the trees," said Maitland.

"You never could have done it yourself," observed Lady Mary.

"Never," returned Beaton, emphatically. "Give me the precious paper which shall be my passport to fortune."

CHAPTER II.

"ON VIEW."

TEN days had gone by rapidly, and Jack Maitland, in the press of business and amusement, was hardly aware that so much time had elapsed. He had contented himself by leaving a card on Mrs. Winington at the hour she was most likely to be out. He was interested and amused by his rencounter with her, and quite able to admire her beauty without being much disturbed by it.

This fine sunny morning he was busy writing letters in his room, before going out for the day, and had laid down his pen before answering an invitation to dinner from Colonel and Mrs. Winington for the following Tuesday.

"I must accept, I suppose," he said to himself. "I have refused a musical evening, and a party to Richmond. I should like to see Jean's husband. It is a droll idea to meet him, and to meet him too without any deadly intentions. Come in," interrupting himself as some one knocked at the door.

"A gentleman wants to know if you will see him, sir," said a waiter, presenting him with a card, on which was printed "Leslie Beaton."

"Yes; show him up," and in a few minutes Beaton walked in.

"I was just thinking of looking you up," cried Maitland, shaking hands with him. "I have not seen anything of you since we supped together at Mrs. Winington's. I thought you would have come with me to hear Gladstone's answer to—"

"My dear fellow, I have been otherwise occupied," interrupted Beaton, with some solemnity, as he drew a chair opposite his friend.

Maitland looked at him, half amused at the mingled expression of triumph and uneasiness in his eyes.

"I have been very seriously occupied," repeated Beaton.

"What have you been about?"

"I have been securing a wife. I have been finding the means of existence."

"What do you mean?"

"You remember that advertisement?"

"Yes."

"Well, I answered it. *Not* the answer I concocted with Lady Mary. My proposal was entertained. I interviewed first the acting guardian, a snuffy, shabby, shrewd old rascal, who has been making rigid inquiries respecting me and my statements. I suppose the result has been so far satisfactory, that guardian number two received me yesterday, and we got on very well. He is a pompous old buffer, but

a gentleman, and it is agreed I am to be introduced to the young lady to-morrow."

"But you are not in earnest? You would not select a wife in this fashion?"

"Why not? What is worse in it than being introduced by—say my sister—to an heiress with a view to matrimony? It is the same sort of operation more openly and satisfactorily conducted. I *too* have been looking into matters, and it is a *bona-fide* ready-money affair. In short, I am inclined to think my luck has turned."

"And the young lady?"

Beaton made a grimace. "I haven't seen her yet, and I can only hope she is not too utterly utter. If she is, why I'll cry off. But, Jack, she has close on five thousand a year. *That* will cover a multitude of defects. Then there are many compensations even for the most devoted husband, and *I* intend to be a model. She shall spend a fair share of her own money as she likes, while I shall amuse myself my own way—in moderation."

"You are old enough to take care of yourself," said Maitland, proceeding to stamp the letters he had addressed. "I confess I feel most for the girl. I suppose she knows nothing about this precious scheme?"

"Hasn't the faintest suspicion. My dear fellow, she will be enchanted with me, *if* I choose; I always get on with women, and Miss Vivian (her name is Vivian) has been secluded all her seventeen or eighteen years. Her father was an enthusiastic naturalist, and had what *he* considered enough to live on (he was evidently a man of limited ideas), so he brought up this girl in the most naturalistic manner possible. I fancy the mother died years ago. Since the father's death my future spouse has lived in the paternal cottage, under the care of the snuffy guardian's sister, and I presume her manners are not of the highest tone. Quite lately she inherited a lot of money from an uncle who had not been on good terms with her father for years, but who

died intestate. I have got Winington's solicitor to look into the matter, and he too says it is a *bona-fide* concern."

There was a moment's silence.

"Why don't you congratulate me, Jack?"

"Perhaps I may later on; at present—well, I don't like the scheme; but I suppose I take things too seriously. I dare say a marriage of this kind is no worse than a large proportion of those which occur every day."

"On the contrary, it is a deuced deal better, less nonsense and more reality; you are quite too desperately in earnest—always were, so Jean says. By the way, she is quite taken up with my plan. Will you come with me and support me in this crisis of my fate?"

"Where?"

"At the Royal Academy to-morrow, one-thirty—to meet the object of my adoration. It's a beastly hour, but that's what old Tilly fixed. Tilly is the superior guardian, and is to introduce me as a 'young friend' to his ward and her chaperon. Really it will be rather fun for you to see the meeting."

"I will come," said Maitland, slowly. "Where shall I find you?"

"Oh, pick me up at the club. Come and have a glass of sherry and a biscuit to keep up our spirits. You know, if the thing can be managed it will be a great chance for me, I am pretty well at the end of everything. Indeed, I must raise funds to carry out this scheme. I don't think oven Winington will advance me a rap. Do you happen to have a few hundreds, Maitland, you would like to lend at high interest?"

"Certainly not," with a grim smile; "I like you too much, old fellow, to have any money transactions with you."

"Niggard!" cried Beaton, in mock heroic tones. "Well, I must try my old friends the Jews. In short, the only chance left me is this marriage. If it fails—but it must

not fail. Now I have to escort Lady Mary to a garden-party at Twickenham, so good-bye till to-morrow. Mind you don't fail me. You'll make a respectable sort of sponsor." With a nod he left the room.

Maitland looked after his old play-fellow with something of uneasiness and disapprobation, as he thought, "He is not to be trusted, I fear; none of them ever were except the old laird. I must see what the victim is like; probably she is an ordinary woman to whom a good name and a higher social position than her own may be all-sufficing."

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The fateful morrow was dull and heavy; but Maitland found Beaton in high, almost too high spirits, and faultless dress, with dainty gloves, and a delicate sprig of gardenia and maiden-hair fern in his button-hole—"quite a bridegroom elect," as Maitland told him.

After a second glass of sherry Beaton declared himself ready, and they set out on their important quest.

Although it was luncheon-time the rooms at Burlington House were full, and Maitland looked eagerly round, seeking some figure that might answer to the idea he had formed of Beaton's intended bride.

There were a variety of visitors, evidently provincial, over whom Maitland's eyes rolled unsatisfied till they were arrested by a group which stood before one of the gems of the exhibition—a large picture representing a wide breezy upland covered with gorse and heather, some sheep feeding in the foreground, and gathering rain-clouds behind. A white-haired neat old gentleman, with a high black satin cravat, was speaking to an elderly woman, who might have been head-nurse or a highly respectable cook and housekeeper in a country family. She wore a closely tied black satin bonnet, and a large shawl of the kind known as Paisley hung in a point from her shoulders to the end of her black skirt, while the hand with which she pointed to a huge hunting scene hanging high above their heads was encased

in stout brown kid-gloves with long empty finger-ends. A step or two in advance stood a slight young girl, whose gown of fawn-colored alpaca was somewhat short and scant; she wore a round cape of black cashmere, its long ends crossed and fastened behind, and a broad-brimmed straw hat adorned with a bow of white ribbon and a large bunch of very stiff forget-me-nots; her feet, clad in white stockings, were planted in stout square-toed serviceable shoes tied on the instep, and had no heels worth mentioning; the whole costume bore the stamp of village millinery. A quaint little *bourgeois* figure, yet Maitland's attention was riveted to it. While he looked Beaton touched him on the shoulder, and exclaimed in a deep whisper—

"Great heavens, there she is!"

Maitland smiled at the dismayed expression of his face.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"Because that is old Tilly the guardian with her; don't you see him looking round for the other victim?"

"He sees you," said Maitland.

Beaton, raising his hat, started forward with a frank pleasant smile to meet the anxious-looking old gentleman who was beckoning him.

"You are a little behind time, are you not, sir?" said Mr. Tilly, in a low tone; "at least it seems a considerable time since we came into this bewildering place."

"I flattered myself I was rather punctual," said Beaton. "Will you allow me to introduce an old friend of mine, Mr. Maitland. I thought it might be as well to make some of my people known to you."

"Certainly, certainly," bowing with old-fashioned politeness; "very happy to know any friend of yours, I am sure. Now—now I will present you. It is really a curious and somewhat daring experiment, but with a man of honor—a—I have no doubt all will go well. Of course I must assume to know you—to have known you, I mean. My young

ward is quite taken up with the pictures. A—a—Edith, my dear," touching her arm.

She turned quickly, and looked full at him with a startled expression, as if suddenly recalled from another world, showing under her large hat a simple, pale, gentle face, the nose a little upturned, the mouth scarcely small enough for beauty, the eyes well set and darkly fringed, but of no particular color, the hair soft, light brown, and smooth—an ordinary little face enough, but pleasant, and not without a certain attraction.

"Edith, my friend Mr. Beaton wishes to know you. Mr. Beaton, Miss Vivian. Mr. Maitland, Miss Vivian."

She looked at them steadily, a slight color stealing up in her cheek, as she made a small, very small courtesy, quaint but not ungraceful, without any attempt to speak. She was turning again to the pictures when Beaton with what Maitland perceived to be an effort, asked, "Is this your first visit to the academy?"

"Yes, I never saw any pictures before, except two or three at home."

"There are quite too many here for comfort, you will be awfully tired before you leave."

"I feel a little giddy when I look round certainly, but I should like to stay on and on till I saw every one."

"You must come constantly, taking a rest between your visits," said Maitland, who was determined to make acquaintance with the poor little heiress.

"I should like it, but it would cost such a number of shillings. Mrs. Miles would have to come too, you know."

"Still I think Mr. Tilly would not object," said Beaton, looking down at her with a caressing smile. "I rather imagine he would find it difficult to refuse *you*."

"Mr. Tilly, yes, he is very kind, but Mr. Dargan is always unhappy about money," she returned, quite unconscious of the implied compliment, and she looked again at the picture.

Beaton seemed checked, and turning, observed politely to Mr. Tilly, "Your friend looks very tired. I think I can find her a seat."

"I'm sure, sir, you are very polite," said the weary Mrs. Miles gratefully, and Beaton escorted her to the long bench in the center of the room, where she sat down with a groan.

"This is a clever picture," said Maitland, who kept his place by Miss Vivian.

"It is wonderful," she said in a low tone, as if absorbed in contemplation; her voice was naturally soft, and her accent fairly good. "I never thought anything could be painted like it; there are some bits of moor-land near my home, and I have seen the clouds gather over them just like those. I almost feel the cold breeze that generally comes up with the rain; and those distant blue hills, how far away they look—that is what I can not do when I try to paint. I can *not* make the distance look far."

"A few months' study with a good master would help you over that difficulty," said Maitland kindly, a feeling of compassionate interest drawing him to the speaker. "You are an artist then?"

"I wish I were. Mr. Dargan has agreed to let me have lessons, and I shall work hard, so hard."

"Work hard!" echoed Beaton, returning to her side as she spoke. "What a tremendous resolution! May I ask what is the object to be attained?"

Miss Vivian colored slightly, and looked down as if she thought he was laughing at her. "I want to learn drawing," she said simply.

"Then Mr. Tilly must find you a good master. Has he any idea whom to employ?"

"Oh, I suppose so."

"It is very important to find the right man," said Beaton gravely. "What master do you think of, Mr. Tilly, for Miss Vivian?"

"I really have not an idea on the subject," replied Tilly

nervously. "I never had anything to do with art or artists. No doubt Mr. Dargan, who is almost universally informed, will be able to supply our needs."

"I don't fancy art is much in his line either," said Beaton, with an air of careless superiority. "Now I know one or two good men, and shall be most happy if I can be of use to Miss Vivian."

"It would be doing me a great service," cried Mr. Tilly, with a look of relief. "I have been a good deal troubled how to gratify this whim of my ward's."

"You must not call it a whim," said Beaton, smiling, and looking down at Miss Vivian as if they understood each other. "It is a laudable ambition, and a charming taste. Will you allow me to see some of your drawings?"

"Yes; then, if you understand about art, you can tell me if I am worth teaching," she returned, with quiet earnestness.

They moved on to look at the other paintings, and Maitland noticed that the little countrified girl was always attracted by landscapes and animals, and, moreover, showed a wonderful amount of discrimination in her observations.

He remarked that she did not seem to care for human figures and faces. "I suppose it is because I have seen more of the country and four-footed creatures than I have of people," she returned. "It seems to me that I understand them better. Do *you* draw?" she asked with some timidity, looking straight into his eyes as she spoke. "You feel the pictures more than he does," and she looked toward Beaton with a little nod.

"He must know more than I do about art; I do not draw, I only ignorantly worship," returned Maitland.

"I am sorry." Something in her voice suggested that she would prefer being assisted by him than by his friend.

"You will find no lack of instructors, Miss Vivian."

"The difficulty will be to choose among the multitude," said Beaton.

"Well, my dear," said poor Mr. Tilly, who had looked frequently toward the door, with an expression of intense weariness, "I suppose you have seen enough for one day, and I—I have an appointment, an appointment of some importance, a—"

"You are very tired," said his ward kindly, glancing at him.

"Why lose your time here then?" asked Beaton blandly. "We shall be delighted to take charge of Miss Vivian and Mrs. —— I did not catch the name, and see them safely *en route* home."

"If you would be so good," said Mr. Tilly, hesitating.

"I shall be most happy, so will Maitland."

"I do not want to stay much longer," said Miss Vivian, "if I can come soon again. There is a great picture of a chariot-race in the next room; I should like to look at it, then I shall be quite ready to go."

"Then *I* shall bid you good-morning, my dear, and good-bye for the present. I am going to the north for a few days. They have discovered a curious tomb in the wall of an old church near Thirlstane, and I want to have a look at it. Meantime, if you need advice or assistance—a—a—you have my excellent colleague Mr. Dargan at hand. Good-morning, Mr. Beaton; good-morning, Mr. Maitland," and with a bow to Mrs. Miles, who was still nodding in the seat Beaton had found for her, the old gentleman walked away with much alacrity.

"Poor old boy! it is really too bad to drag him about. Don't you think *I* might fill the place of guide, philosopher, and friend, and leave him at peace?" exclaimed Beaton, looking after him with a smile.

"Thank you, you are very kind. If it would not be too much trouble I should be so glad to be shown some of the things I ought to see. Mrs. Miles and I feel very lost here,

and we might almost as well go about blindfold as go about alone."

"Good. Then I shall devote myself to your service during the remainder of your stay. What shall we do to-morrow? Can we manage the Tower, the Monument, St. Paul's and Madame Tussaud?"

"If you do, Miss Vivian must have forty-horse-power of sight-seeing and endurance," siad Maitland, laughing.

"I have seen the Tower and the wax-works," returned Miss Vivian gravely. "I think Mrs. Miles must rest to-morrow; but could you take me to a school of art, or a drawing class? we might find out the cost, and go and tell Mr. Dargan after. Do you know Mr. Dargan too?"

"I have that honor," with an air of profound respect. Miss Vivian looked quickly and keenly at him. "The best plan is to permit me to call on you to-morrow, at any hour you may appoint, and we can arrange our campaign. I shall in the meantime make some inquiries about studios, etc., etc."

"You are very good indeed; I feel *so* much obliged to you." The color came slowly, softly into her cheeks, and a very sweet smile parted her lips. "I am sure Mr. Tilly will be very pleased."

"Mr. Tilly is a very dear friend of mine," said Beaton gravely.

"I suppose so."

"Then you must give me your address," and Beaton took out his note-book.

"Thirteen Albert Street, Camden Town," said Mrs. Miles, who had scarcely spoken before, and who now joined them. Her accent was peculiarly flat and her voice of the sing-song description, though her utterance was rapid.

"Camden Town!" repeated Beaton. "Why did they banish you to so terrible a locality?"

"Dear, dear! is it that bad?" exclaimed Mrs. Miles, in much dismay. "They're uncommon nice rooms, and dear

enough, I can tell you—five-and-twenty shillings a week, and half a crown for the kitchen fire."

"The place is perfectly respectable, I have no doubt," said Maitland, laughing. "My friend Beaton is very fastidious; anything further west than Kensington or north than Portman Square appears a savage wilderness to him."

"Don't believe him; he is only a country lout himself, Miss Vivian. He has always lived in the wilds."

Miss Vivian looked from one to the other with a puzzled air; then, as if wishing to atone for what seemed to her the rudeness of Beaton's speech, she said softly, with a kind look into Maitland's face, "That is no matter; it has not made you wild or rude."

"You little know him!" said Beaton, in tragic tones.

"You are laughing. Do you always laugh?" she asked, uneasily. "Come, Miley, let us go home. I think I know the omnibus we came in, and you are too tired to walk."

"Don't think of it," said Beaton, as they moved toward the entrance; "I will get you a cab."

"Not a cab; Mr. Dargan told us to avoid cabs, they cost so much money. I would rather spend it on drawing lessons."

"Mr. Dargan is—let us say, overcautious."

"He is a careful man, sir, and *my* brother," put in Mrs. Miles.

"And most conscientious, I am sure," said Beaton, in a peculiar tone. "Still you must let me insist on a cab, and I will settle with the driver."

"No, certainly not!" cried Miss Vivian, decidedly. "I shall pay for it myself."

"I dare not contradict you. Then at what hour may I present myself to-morrow?" asked Beaton, with an air of profound deference.

"Oh, to-morrow? Well, any time after nine; they will not give us our breakfast till half past eight," returned Miss Vivian.

Beaton gazed at her with so bewildered an expression that Maitland could not resist laughing. "My friend here is not given to early rising," he said. "He has a terrible complaint which checks his natural energy—want of occupation."

"That is very bad, very wearisome," she returned, gravely. "Will *you* come to-morrow too?" she continued, looking at Maitland without a shade of hesitation or embarrassment.

"I am sorry I can not have that pleasure; I have an engagement."

"What! at nine in the morning?" said Beaton.

"Not quite so early."

"Well, Miss Vivian, if I may come after luncheon, say about two-thirty, we will arrange some charming plans."

"Thank you; we shall have quite finished dinner by that time."

"You may be sure I shall be punctual."

Here a hansom, which Beaton had hailed, drove up.

"Dear, dear! I can not abide those things!" cried Mrs. Miles; "you do see the horse's head so plain. I am always frightened it is going to fall."

"They are much the best, I assure you; a worse danger lurks in the four-wheeler, believe me. All the worst and most infectious diseases travel in them to the hospitals."

"Think of that now! Isn't it a shame? What'll we do, missee, my dear?"

"Oh, let us take the hansom; there is really no danger." She paused, and after a moment's hesitation held out her hand, first to Beaton and then to Maitland, with no undignified simplicity.

As the cab drove away Beaton passed his arm through Maitland's, and they walked away down Piccadilly in silence for a few paces; then Beaton exclaimed with a groan, "She is even worse than I expected. What a price

I shall have to pay for independence! What a figure! what a toilet! Could anything ever lick her into shape?"

"I don't agree with you," returned Maitland; "she is quaint, but far from commonplace. I believe if she were dressed up, like Lady Mary Hay or your sister, she might even look pretty."

"Like Lady Mary! Great heavens! what are you thinking of? Did you see her white stockings and charity-school shoes?"

"I did, and I also observed that the ankles so travestied were remarkably neat."

"Why, Jack, you are not going in for rivalship?"

"You are quite safe so far as I am concerned," returned Maitland, dryly. "But I doubt if your game will be as easy as you anticipate."

"Easy! it is sure to be hard work in any case; and then this craze for art! I must get Jean to help me there. In fact, I shall never get through the affair without Jean's help; but I can count on her; she wants to get me off her hands."

"Why, Beaton, with your interest and sharpness you ought to be able to make your own living without having to sell yourself."

"Make my own living! What a disgusting phrase! Really, Jack, there is a stronger colonial flavor about you than I thought. However, I have not committed myself to anything. Old Dargan, the snuffy one, wants to make some final conditions before I open the siege in form. By the way, are you to dine with the Winingtons on Thursday?"

"I am."

"Then pray tell Jean the enormous sacrifice I am going to make to a stern sense of duty."

"What duty?"

"The duty of self-maintenance."

"I shall tell her my opinion if she asks it. Now I must leave you."

"Won't you come down to Hurlingham? Jeanie will be there, and she told me to bring you."

"Sorry I can't, but I have an appointment with the man who wants the Craigrothie moors this autumn; I am almost late already."

"Well, good-bye for the present. If you had any bowels of compassion you would not leave me to my sorrow."

"I feel sure you will not long need consolation," said Maitland, smiling, as he nodded good-bye to his friend, and turned up Air Street on his way to Regent Circus. "It is no affair of mine," he mused. "I have no business to interfere, but I can't help feeling sorry for that poor child. She doesn't look as if she could hold her own in the world Beaton will introduce her to. But women are kittle cattle; I can not take credit to myself for understanding them, though I have had a lesson or two."

CHAPTER III.

"GREEK MEETS GREEK."

MRS. WININGTON'S beautiful drawing-rooms were redolent of the flowers with which they were profusely decorated, and shaded by sun-blinds to becoming dimness when she came down dressed for dinner, her white neck and arms gleaming through the filmy black lace which affected to cover them; the coils of her rich auburn-red hair dotted with tiny diamond bees and butterflies.

She was ready in good time this especial Thursday, as she hoped for an opportunity of speaking to her brother before Colonel Winington appeared.

"Leslie is always late. I do hope he had my note," she thought, as she sunk into a comfortable corner of the sofa in the inner room and sat for some moments in thought,

resting her cheek on her hand, a softened expression lending unusual beauty to her handsome face; then, rousing herself, she leaned forward to glance at the clock, and as she did so Mr. Beaton was announced. "I was afraid you would not come in time," she exclaimed.

"What is it, Jean? Are you in a scrape?"

"A scrape! *Me?*" she returned, with a large note of interrogation. "That is not likely to happen. No; I want to warn you against confiding this matrimonial venture of yours to Jack Maitland. I am half afraid you have done so already."

"Yes; of course I have. Did I not tell you I took him with me to witness my interview with my *fiancée,* as I consider her?"

"Then you are a greater fool than I took you for. Unless he has changed, Jack is the sort of man who strains at gnats and does *not* swallow camels. He is quite capable of telling the girl, or making a row."

"And cutting me out himself, eh?" added Beaton, laughing at his sister's irritation. "I think you do him injustice; he is not quite such an idiot. You don't suppose he is still the credulous blockhead *you* bamboozled? I can tell you he is both tough and hard."

"Very likely," returned Mrs. Winington, a faint, almost tender smile passing over her lips. "Still he would despise your method of finding a well-dowered wife. I hope you did not let him think *I* knew anything about it?"

"Of course I did. Why, I backed myself up with your approbation."

"Really, Leslie, you are too unprincipled. You can not even believe that other people have scruples. I am infinitely annoyed. What will Jack Maitland think of me?"

"He won't think about you; and what the deuce would it matter if he did? He is not horrified—not a bit of it. He was rather amused with the whole affair. If anything,

he is rather taken with my little Quakeress. It is only natural, you know, that having been jilted by a lioness, he should console himself with a mouse."

Mrs. Winington did not reply at once, but a flash of vivid anger gleamed in her eyes, a look that Beaton knew and never trifled with.

"It would serve you right if he won the prize from you," she said quietly. "It is well you told me. I shall know what line to take. If," she continued, after another slight pause—"if I am to assist you, you must consult and be guided by me. Leslie, I have not seen you for nearly a week; have you been absorbed by your devotion to Miss Vivian, or to—"

"Not altogether," he interrupted quickly. "I have escorted her to the Kensington Museum, and the British Museum, and the Zoo, but my evenings have been my own. She is raving to go to the theater, but I can *not* stand that. It is more than any man can stand to appear in public with the fearful old goody who chaperons her. Your maid would disdain to associate with Mrs. Miles. She has a bad cold just now, thank Heaven. You must really help me, Jean, and educate your future sister-in-law up to something suitable before I marry her; and for Heaven's sake find her a drawing master, or a studio. She is a pertinacious little devil, and more difficult to make an impression on than I expected. Somehow she seemed struck with Maitland; she has twice asked me about him. She appears to think we are social Siamese twins."

"Ah, indeed," returned Mrs. Winington, thoughtfully. "Well, Leslie, whenever you have finally settled with the acting guardian, I will call on this girl and see what is to be done. I might ask her here, as Lady Mary has gone to do penance with her mother-in-law. But she must be obedient; she must put herself completely in my hands."

"Ah, Beaton, it is something to see you in good time,"

said Colonel Winington, who had entered unperceived, and now approached them.

He was short and broad, with bowed legs and anything but a soldierly carriage. He derived his rank from the command of his county militia, to which his territorial possessions entitled him, and the field in which he had won renown was the hunting-field. An exceedingly red weather-beaten face, small sharp eyes, and iron-gray hair contrasted strongly with his wife's grace and dignity; but he had a big, honest, kindly mouth, which displayed a good set of teeth when it widened into a broad grin, his nearest approach to a laugh.

"Yes, I am going to be practical and punctual," returned Beaton, gravely. "In short I am going to turn over that new leaf I have been so long fingering."

"High time you should, my dear fellow."

"Why, Leslie, you have turned over new leaves enough to make a large volume," said his sister.

"Sir James and Lady Preston," announced the butler, and Mrs. Winington went forward to receive them. Lady Mary Hay and Mr. Maitland quickly followed; then Mr. Ellis, a well-known dining-out man, and the little party was complete.

Mrs. Winington welcomed Maitland with frank cordiality, and introduced him as an old play-fellow to her husband, who shook hands with him and said he was very glad to make his acquaintance. Then dinner was announced. Maitland took in Lady Mary, and found her an amusing companion; indeed every one of the party seemed gifted with the power of saying trifles agreeably in a way that sounded witty. The time flew in exchange of scandal, anecdote, and political chit-chat, and when the men rose from table, Colonel Winington excused himself from joining the ladies on the plea that he had promised to vote on a division that night. Sir James Preston, who held the re-

sponsible appointment of Under Secretary to the Pounce and Taper Office, accompanied him.

"Do help me to persuade Lady Preston to sing," said Mrs. Winington to her brother, as he came up to her. "Have you ever heard Lady Preston sing, Mr. Maitland? She is a real songstress. Nature and art combined. Just one song before you go, please."

"I shall be most happy," and the lady, who had not refused, for Mrs. Winington had not asked her before, went readily to the piano, and trilled out one of Tosti's impassioned songs very deliciously.

Mrs. Winington sat profoundly still in her corner of the sofa, her head slightly turned from Maitland, showing the graceful outline of her throat and the delicate beauty of her small ear. When the song was ended, Mrs. Winington heaved a deep sigh, and looking round to Maitland, who stood near her, smiled as she raised her eyes to his.

"What wonderful pathos she puts into it! It is a voice that pierces the heart, or whatever does duty for that sentimental organ."

"A lovely voice," he returned, "but a most doleful ditty. Do you not sing? I think I remember your singing 'Mary Morrison' in what I then considered a heavenly style."

"I never sing Scotch songs except when I am alone," said Mrs. Winington. "When I want to live the past over again, I sit down and croon to myself."

She drew her dress closer to her to make room, and with a gesture invited him to sit beside her. Maitland obeyed; the rest clustered round the piano discussing a new operetta, morsels from which Lady Preston played from time to time.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Winington slowly, opening and shutting a large black feather fan, "how is it that my brother has persuaded you to assist him in his extraordinary scheme of finding a wife and a fortune from an advertise-

ment? I did not think you could have so completely cast aside the romantic chivalry that used to distinguish you in the days when we were Jean and Jack to each other."

"Romantic chivalry!" repeated Maitland, smiling. "I am not aware I ever possessed such a characteristic. It must have evaporated long ago. But, Mrs. Winington, I had no idea what Leslie was about until he came and asked me to be present at his introduction to the young lady whom he intends to appropriate. I confess I was amazed, and expressed my astonishment freely; but you don't suppose any preaching of mine would influence your brother?"

"No, I do not think any one influences him. But he has been talking to me very seriously about this strange idea of his, and has rather won me over. We have had a great deal of anxiety about Leslie. He is provoking, but lovable. You see he is one of those unlucky men who can not work."

"Indeed!" said Maitland dryly.

"Ah! to a man of your energy that must seem impossible or contemptible, but you are quite different, you are—" She stopped, looked down, and a soft flush stole over her cheek and throat. "At all events," raising her eyes to Maitland's, which were bent on her with calm observation that stung her with an irritating sense that he was the stronger of the two—"at all events poor Leslie has cost us a good deal in every way, and really, *if* this girl is not too dreadful, it would be well to secure her fortune for my brother. You know what a pleasant, easy-tempered fellow he is. He would never be a steady husband, nor would he ever be an unkind one. Her money might be tied up, and they would get on as well as half—two-thirds of the married people one meets."

"Perhaps," said Maitland, half unconsciously, as the recollection of the innocent, thoughtful, fearless eyes that looked out from under Miss Vivian's countrified hat came back to him with a great wave of compassion.

"Tell me, what is she really like?" pursued Mrs. Winington. "I can depend on what you say more than on Leslie's report. Of course she is not a gentlewoman."

"I do not think my judgment can be of much use to you, Mrs. Winington; our ideas must be as widely different as our experiences. Miss Vivian is exceedingly rustic, and even to my uninstructed eye badly dressed, but she is rather quaint than unlady-like, there is no tinge of vulgarity about her. She is rather pretty; well, perhaps interesting is a better word, so it seems to me."

"Then you think I might make something of her?"

"Oh, you could do wonders I have no doubt."

"Ah, Mr. Maitland, your tone is cynical, but I am ready to bear a good deal from you." This with a deprecating smile and upward glance from her soft brown beseeching eyes.

Maitland laughed good-humoredly.

"You wrong me. In sober earnest I believe you could influence any young girl *if* you chose to be kind to her," he said.

"You have grown very hard in these long years of wandering, Jack—forgive me, I mean Mr. Maitland."

"My surroundings have certainly not been calculated to soften me," he returned. "But I don't suppose I am harder or stronger than my neighbors. However, I trust if you take up this scheme of your brother's you will give some consideration to the young lady's interests. I suppose your womanly sympathy will be her safeguard."

"You seem to have espoused her cause very warmly," said Mrs. Winington, looking down.

"I do not think I have, only I like fair play. Remember, it is a game of blindman's buff, with tremendous odds against the blind man, or rather woman."

"You are right," said Mrs. Winington, gently. "I *will* remember what is due to this poor young thing. I promise to be her friend as well as Leslie's."

"I have no doubt you will be," began Maitland, when he was interrupted by a demand from Mr. Ellis.

"Do ask Lady Mary to sing, Mrs. Winington. I am sure she sings, and she is going to steal away to Lady Annandale's ball without acceding to our prayer."

"But I don't sing; I don't do anything but cumber the earth," said Lady Mary. "I always find people to do everything for me much better than I could do things myself. Why should I trouble?"

"You must pay your shot, however, in one way or another," cried Mr. Ellis.

"Not that I am aware of," replied Lady Mary. "I can't pay for anything; I am too disgustingly poor."

"Yet you contribute your share and a large one," cried Beaton. "You add the harmonizing tone, the complimentary touch of color needed by society." His tone, though light, had a tinge of earnestness in it.

"My dear Mr. Beaton, you must have been attending some popular lectures on art. If I get on at all it is because I am a neutral tint," said Lady Mary, coming over to say good-night to Mrs. Winington. "So sorry not to be still with you, dear. Yours is a delightful house to stay in, but I must do the devoted to my mother-in-law, or the result will be insolvency."

Lady Preston and Mr. Ellis were also going on to other engagements, and Beaton escorted Lady Mary.

"If you are not engaged too, I will sing you a Scotch song," said Mrs. Winington, as Maitland turned to bid her good-evening. "Do you care to stay?"

So Maitland stayed.

* * * * * * *

Mr. Dargan, who was in a sense the arbiter of Edith Vivian's destiny, occupied the second floor in a dingy street off Chancery Lane. It was a den worthy the occupant, furnished scantily, with book-shelves full of shabby calf-bound volumes, deed boxes, an iron safe, a knee-hole table

loaded with papers, a few leather-covered chairs worn away at the edges, the horse-hair protruding through the fractures, a square of carpet from which the pattern had long since disappeared, discolored blinds, uncleaned windows, and pervaded by the odor of long accumulated dust. Mr. Dargan himself was standing beside the table holding a letter, at which he did not look—a small, lean, angular man, with crooked legs, and a large head, sharp little light eyes fenced by spectacles, a wide, thin-lipped mouth that seemed forever smiling, and a short, upturned, interrogative nose. His head was covered with a brown wig faded and shrunk from time and use, a fringe of thin grizzled hair showing below it at the sides, corresponding to his ragged whiskers. He wore an old-fashioned tail-coat and a black stock. Dress, face, wig, all had a general hue of rust, an unwashed aspect not pleasant to look upon. His lips moved, as if repeating something to himself. Presently he muttered, "Five thou; can't venture to put it higher anyhow, and that's a poor price," then he looked at the letter in his hand, and read it through with a sardonic grin. "Blessed old babby," he said half aloud, as he restored it to the envelope, "it shall have its toys, it shall; it shall rub its brasses as long as it does not hinder me from gathering the tin. I can manage business matters so much better than he can, eh! I believe you! Well, well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. Lord, what fools they all are! Here's another," taking up a second letter, written in scrawly lines slanting downward, and reading—"'When is my darling to come back to me? she'll never be happy among the grand friends you have picked up for her; she doesn't want to go to them neither.' Don't she though? Wait till she finds she has a lover in that long-legged Scotchman. If Sally had an ounce of sense, what a help she might be to me! as it is I am obliged to keep the screw on, and one never gets the same good work under pressure as you do from free will. It's a mercy I have a bit of writing that

might ruin her boy, the big idiot. I have him and her in my grip pretty fast. 'Your loving sister, S. Miles.' Bother! why the devil *will* she write? letters are always dangerous," tearing it viciously into a dozen pieces, and casting it into the waste-basket. "I'll turn her to account for all her devotion to the girl."

Here a dirty, shock-headed office-boy coming in interrupted him. "Gen'leman," he said spasmodically, thrusting a card almost in his master's face.

"Ha! show him in; and mind you, I'm particularly engaged. Don't let mortal in, not even Mr. Lewis."

The boy nodded and went out, whereupon Leslie Beaton entered, perfectly dressed, fresh, cool, good-humored, an extraordinary contrast to Dargan and his surroundings.

"Good-morning, sir, good-morning," said the latter, shambling across the room to fetch a chair. "Sit down. Warm mornin', ain't it? Sun in your eyes?" He went to pull down the blind too suddenly, for it gave way at one side, and hung in a doleful festoon.

"Pray don't trouble yourself, I am quite comfortable." And Beaton, who had been more than once in the dusty lair, took a rapid glance at the chairs, selecting the least bristly, instead of the one offered him.

"Well, well, my dear sir, how are we getting on?" asked Dargan.

"That is what you call a leading question," returned Beaton, smiling. "On the whole, not badly. I have been doing my duty. I have called, and been graciously received. I have presented flowers, and they have been graciously, nay, joyously, accepted. In another fortnight or so I presume I may, with your sanction, venture to propose."

"There are just a few preliminaries to settle first," said Dargan, gently scratching his right temple with the top of his pen. "I asked you to come and talk them over, be-

cause Mr. Tilly leaves everything to me. He's gone away to Yorkshire to rub up the brasses on an old tomb, or some such thing; anyhow he ain't here, and we don't want him."

"Oh, I am perfectly content. You have a masterly way of managing business that is quite remarkable. Pray what are these preliminaries? I thought you had sufficiently inquired as to my walk in life, and found the particulars highly creditable. In fact I am the most virtuous man about town. I had even got rid of my debts before I had the pleasure of meeting your charming ward, though I warn you they are beginning rapidly to accumulate again."

"That I dare say," returned Dargan with a grin. "I am prepared to stand your friend, and remember, without my full consent"—here his little eyes twinkled gleefully—"*no* man has a chance for three or four years to come. Now I am not going to give it lightly; and first, are ye disposed to make *any* sacrifice to prove you are in earnest?"

"My dear sir, I really have nothing to sacrifice but my liberty, and liberty paralyzed by want of the circulating medium is not much to resign."

"Ahem! true for you," said Dargan, with a sigh. "I'm sure it would take half a day to tell all the trouble and toil I've had with the Vivian estate, to say nothing of the valuable time it has taken up, and not even twenty pounds for a mourning ring to reward me. You know, old Tilly and me, we are executors as well as guardians, and every blessed bit of work has fallen to my share. Of course I'd gladly do my best for the minor. Me and my sister look upon her as our own child, that we do." Here he took a pinch of snuff to hide the intensity of his feelings, and waited for a reply. Beaton, however, only bowed assent. "As I said," resumed Dargan, "I'd do anything for the dear child, but I am a poor man; my time is my money, and I have spent hours, ay, months upon her."

"I begin to understand," said Beaton, leaning forward,

his elbows on his knees and his chin on his hands. "Pray go on."

"You are not a business man, Mr. Beaton," continued Dargan, with an insinuating grin, "you are above these sort of things; but I had a very sensible letter from a young man I once pulled through an awkward fix, and who has since shot ahead and made a lot of money. He wrote on spec, and thinking he might suit, I answered him much about the time you wrote; then, when Mr. Tilly thought you the likeliest party of the two, I put him off. Just look at his view of the matter."

Beaton took and read the letter; it contained a distinct offer of four thousand pounds on condition that a marriage between him and Dargan's ward should be completed, and settlements fully satisfactory to himself should be drawn up.

"Ah! this is extremely distinct. You wish some remuneration for your valuable time and fatherly care? I really don't see what claim you have on me, my dear sir. If my future wife wishes to bestow any trifling gift in the shape of friendship's offering as a token of gratitude for your disinterested care, I have no objection."

Mr. Dargan grinned more amiably than ever.

"And suppose I withdraw my sanction, my assistance, where are you?"

"And suppose I persuade the young lady to dispense with your consent?" asked Beaton, with an ineffable air. "What shall you do?"

"Let her money accumulate until I grant it, and tie it up so tight that you can't touch a rap, save with her consent, during her life or after her death."

"But you would not give her to this—this bagman?" asked Beaton, striking the letter with his finger, and then throwing it on the table.

"Why not? He is a good sort of fellow, with reddish hair, not unlike yourself."

Beaton looked at him, and then burst into a good-humored fit of laughing.

"I fancy Miss Vivian would see a difference," he said.

"May be so, may be so, but that ain't the question. Are you inclined to follow my correspondent's example? I am foolish enough when I like a man, as I like you, especially when I am inclined to believe you would make my dear little ward happy, to forget my own interest, only I mustn't, I mustn't allow myself to be weak, for my poor sister's sake as well as my own. Who'll look after me when I am past my work?"

"I can not tell, I am sure. But how do you think it would sound if I were to make your proposition public?"

"I don't know, and I don't care much; besides, I am not going to commit myself to anything in writing, and I'll just say it's an invention—*my* word is as good as yours."

Beaton laughed. "Really your candor is quite refreshing. Where do you think I shall find four thousand pounds?"

"Oh, you'll find that much fast enough. Now, to show I am disposed to favor you, instead of pitting my Birmingham friend against you, and raising my terms, I'll only ask the same, *provided* you leave the management of the property in my hands when it comes into yours. *You* wouldn't care to be bothered toiling and moiling after rents, and all that."

"You are an admirable diplomate after the knock-me-down Bismarckian school, Mr. Dargan," said Beaton, leaning back in his chair and eying the little guardian through half-closed lids. "I can not admire your cynical frankness sufficiently."

"It's all very fine talking," returned Dargan. "But I have what you want, and if you are in earnest you must come to terms."

After some further fencing, Beaton, who was extremely impatient to finish the enterprise he had undertaken, to be

legally master of Miss Vivian's fortune, and to be delivered from his dependent condition; moreover, too indolent to prolong the struggle in which he was at a decided disadvantage, showed signs of yielding. Dargan, eagle-eyed to pounce on any unguarded point, pressed home.

"Why, I have been here nearly an hour," cried Beaton at last, looking at his watch, "and it is such a fine day. My time is nearly up. Let us come to some conclusion."

"Ay, by all means, it rests with you; you know my terms, and I am really sorry I can't move an inch from them, not with justice to myself."

"A sense of justice which I imagine never fails you."

"I hope it never will, my dear sir, never."

"Well, look here then; I don't mind about the money, but I should like to put my own man to manage the estate for me, in short, excuse the brutality, I would rather not have *you* for the middleman."

"Don't mention it," said Dargan with a grin, "though you will regret the prejudice by and by. If I fall in with your views I must have an equivalent."

"What will you consider an equivalent?" cried Beaton, again looking impatiently at his watch.

"Hum! it is rather hard to say off-hand; but there, I will not bargain with a man like yourself—hand me over five thousand pounds within a week of your marriage and I shall be satisfied."

"Five thousand! that is a tremendous haul, and, as you tell me, there is not much ready money. Will not this cramp me?"

"Not a bit of it. That last purchase of old Vivian's, which swallowed up so much of his ready cash, is worth nearly double what he gave for it. I can get you double what it cost him any day for a piece of it. Then we have let two farms in Norfolk for fifteen hundred a year between them. Oh, there is plenty of property; you just sign a little bond acknowledging yourself my debtor for five thou-

sand pounds at five per cent., and matters will go smooth and easy."

"For you perhaps. But I am not such an incapable as to put myself so completely in your power. Would you trust *me* as you ask me to trust you?"

"Ay, don't you be too mistrustful; it is a bad sign, my dear young friend."

"I will sign no such bond, Mr. Dargan, I assure you, unless I can be secured in some way. Why, you might demand payment whether I were married or not."

"Why, what have I done that you think me a common cheat?"

"Rather an *un*common one," returned Beaton contemptuously. "Of course I mean in an intellectual sense. Show me how I can be secured, and I'll sign what you like as to the five thousand pounds."

"Dear, dear! what a money-lender was spoiled when you were born a gentleman," exclaimed Dargan, with an admiring leer.

"Born a borrower instead of a lender, you mean."

"Let me see, how can I satisfy you? I am that obliging, I'd like to make things easy. Suppose when you execute the bond I give you a letter stating that unless the marriage between you and Miss Vivian takes place the bond is void, that I absolve you from all obligation of payment?"

"Yes, I think that might do, but I should like counsel's opinion on it."

"Ah, what nonsense! There is no use throwing away a fee. Just ask any lawyer you know, put a case without mentioning names, and he'll tell you you are as safe as the bank."

"I will," returned Beaton; "meantime, unless advised to the contrary, it is a bargain."

"Good, good; I am glad you see your own interest."

"Then I can press on with my suit. By the way, my sister is so good as to say she will call on Miss Vivian. I

should like to invite my future *fiancée* to stay with her; she will want a good deal of coaching up. If she does, Mr. Dargan, I warn you she will ask you for big checks."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Dargan, shrugging up his shoulders as if in pain. "Does it cost such a heap to start a young lady?"

"I fancy the general run of milliners' bills would make you open your eyes. But I have an appointment, and I am late already. *Now* I suppose I may make all the running I can?"

"Certainly, I am as ready to sing haste to the wedding as you are. You are just the husband I should like for my dear little pet, my pretty ward."

"Much obliged to you," said Beaton, taking his hat; "let me have a line when the bond *and* the letter are ready, so good-morning."

"Rascally old money-grubber!" he muttered as he ran down-stairs and hailed a hansom to convey him to a more agreeable meeting. "I shall give you a wide berth once your ward is transformed into Mrs. Leslie Beaton."

CHAPTER IV.

BELEAGUERED.

"It is an infernal nuisance being kept here week after week," said Jack Maitland to himself as he walked slowly up Regent Street one bright afternoon, when all the world seemed crowding to shop and drive and disport themselves in the great thoroughfare. The shop windows were resplendent with every luxury that wealth could buy or human ingenuity invent, and the pavement thronged with busy well-dressed and ill-dressed pedestrians. "There's no sight of its kind like this, I suppose," mused Jack, "but I would rather not see it every day, unless I had a good lot of real work to do. It would be better for me to be away,

back at Craigrothie. There is not much doing there now, but a few days' fishing can always be had; that's an amusement one can enjoy with quiet pulses, which is more than can be said of some here." So thinking, Maitland approached Oxford Circus, intending to call on a New Zealand acquaintance now settled in Tyburnia.

Suddenly a look of surprised attention replaced the careless glance with which he had noticed the shops and the varied throngs, as his eye was attracted by a little figure in a gray waterproof and a brown hat. The wearer was one of a group gazing into a window full of the most delicate and airy creations in the shape of bonnets, wreaths, and caps, and was far too much absorbed in contemplation to notice Maitland, who had immediately recognized Edith Vivian.

He was quite startled to see her in that noisy crowded thoroughfare. Country-bred as he was, it seemed to him unbecoming for a lady to venture alone in ne of the busiest of London streets, and he hastened to give her the protection of his companionship.

"Miss Vivian, may I hope you remember that I was introduced to you by—"

"Oh, yes," she interrupted, with a bright startled look of surprise and pleasure, a quick blush flitting over her cheek. "I am very glad to see you. I was just beginning to fear I had taken a wrong turn, that round place is rather puzzling, and *you* will show me the best way back to Regent's Park."

"I shall be most happy to assist you in any way. How is it that you are alone?" asked Jack Maitland, gravely.

"Mrs. Miles is very unwell, she has been suffering dreadfully for some days from neuralgia. So I walked down to Oxford Street to buy a wonderful cure we saw advertised in the newspaper; then I could not help looking into the shops, they are so beautiful, and I have come far out of my way, I am afraid, without knowing it."

"I shall certainly see you home, or call a cab, whichever you like," said Maitland. "It is not quite safe for you to wander about alone."

"Why? There is nothing to fear. I take very little money, and no one ever interferes with me."

"Still, I do not like to see you by yourself. Will you walk or drive?"

"I would rather walk, if you will walk with me. I get so little walking, and it is very wearisome to sit all day in the house."

"Very well, let us walk," returned Maitland, amused and touched by her unconscious natural manner. "I suppose you have seen enough of the shops?"

"Indeed I have not. I never dreamed that clothes could be so delightful, that I should want to buy things so much," she said, laughing; "but I do not want to look at them any more just now, if that is what you mean. I have been too long away from Mrs. Miles."

"Very well, let us make for Camden Town at once. I think you said you lived in Camden Town. Can you walk all that way?"

"Oh, it is not far; I used to walk miles in the country."

Little more was said till Maitland had piloted her across Oxford Street, and they had reached the comparative quiet of Langham Place. Maitland noticed the smooth, elastic step of his companion, the ease and grace of her movements; they indicated, he thought, symmetry of form; while her silence, which was not from lack of intelligence, but from the absence of any effort to speak unless she had something to say, had a soothing effect.

"I suppose you ride when you are at home?" began Maitland, who was curious to learn something of her past.

"Not now. When I had my father with me we had a dear old white pony, and I used often to ride on him, sometimes without a saddle; his back was quite broad and comfortable. But one day, afterward, you know" (he under-

stood that she meant after her father's death), "Mr. Dargan came down and saw poor old Bob feeding in the little field near the cottage. Then he said he was no use, and sold him, and let the field to strangers, so we have only the garden and orchard now."

"I dare say you were sorry for the pony."

"Sorry! I *was* sorry! It made me hate Mr. Dargan," emphatically. "Indeed I shall never like him, I have told him so; but I am almost inclined to forgive him for sending my good kind Miley to live with me. I do not know what would become of me without Miley."

"I suppose that is a pet name for Mrs. Miles?" Miss Vivian gave a little nod of assent. "It is rather alarming to hear a young lady confess that she hates any one."

"Is it? Well, I did hate Mr. Dargan, and I hated the doctor at Littlemere; I can not or I could not help it. I believe I had a bad temper."

"Has time tamed it, or have you nobly struggled to overcome your own evil nature?" asked Maitland, looking down with a smile at the sweet, thoughtful face beside him.

Miss Vivian laughed a low, pleasant, happy laugh. "I am afraid not; I grew stronger and did not need the doctor, and as I felt better and brighter and able to enjoy I forgot Mr. Dargan. Now he is going to let me learn drawing, and I feel almost friendly toward him."

There was a pause. Maitland thought with growing interest and sincere compassion that this was not a nature to be satisfied with the shams of society and the paste diamonds of a showy setting to life. Still Beaton could be very fascinating, and she might believe him the best of men, nor have her faith disturbed all the days of her life.

"If Mrs. Miles is well enough to see me, perhaps you will let me look at some of your drawings when we reach your lodgings!"

"Yes, I will, gladly. I can draw very little now, but I am to go to a studio in Kensington, at least I hope so.

They have promised to get Mr. Dargan's consent."

"Who have promised?"

"Mr. Beaton and his sister. Do you know that he brought his sister to see me? Was it not good of him? And she," a look of infinite pleasure and admiration beaming over her face, "oh, she is lovely! she is like a beautiful gracious queen, and so kind to *me*, a mere ignorant country girl. She has asked me to stay with her while I am studying, and says she will do all that is necessary for me. Is it not wonderful?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Maitland, "you mean Mrs. Winington. She is certainly charming. When do you go to stay with her?"

"I am not quite sure. I should have gone on Monday, but Mrs. Miles was ill, and I could not leave her; indeed that is the only drawback. I do not like her being alone by herself in the cottage—she will fret; but she says she does not mind. I think Mr. Dargan has told her she must not."

So Mrs. Winington was not letting the grass grow under her feet in the prosecution of her brother's plan. How would it all end for the guileless child, who was probably looked upon by both as a mere incumbrance to her own wealth? What would be the result of Mrs. Winington's training? what of associations with Leslie Beaton? How much of her fearless candor, her outspoken truthfulness, would be left after three or four years of life under their guidance? Maitland was conscious of almost fatherly compassion and tenderness toward his young companion, and yet he could do nothing to help or save her; his interference would be worse than useless. If he could induce Jean, Mrs. Winington, to espouse her cause! But could he? He thoroughly distrusted that charming personage, although she still had fascination for him. At any rate he would call on her and endeavor to find her real disposition toward the lonely little heiress.

All this passed through his brain rapidly, and he said aloud, "Mr. Dargan appears a very potent person."

"He is," said Miss Vivian, with a little sigh; "I can not get any money except by his consent. I do not know what he will think of all Mrs. Winington talks of buying for me."

"I have no doubt Mrs. Winington will manage him if any one can."

More desultory but friendly sympathetic talk brought them to the door of Miss Vivian's temporary abode.

"Will you come in?" she said; and Maitland, with an odd feeling that he was in some way trespassing, followed her into a small sitting-room of a most "lodging-house" order, only saved from vulgarity by its neatness and the abundant flowers which beautified and perfumed it. "If you will sit down for a moment I will see how Mrs. Miles is." She pointed to a chair and left the room.

"What an abode for an heiress!" thought Jack Maitland, glancing round at the mean furniture and narrow space. "I don't suppose she has the faintest idea of her own possessions. She ought to be informed. I am half inclined to tell her myself. I earnestly hope they will tie up her money strictly when she marries Beaton; for I suppose she must—she can hardly escape." He took up a book, it was White's "Selborne;" he took up another, "Old Mortality." "Not quite the newest literature," said Maitland to himself, with a smile. He looked inside the cover, and found a coat-of-arms and crest, with the name "Richard Vivian" printed under it. "A volume from the family library, I suppose."

At this point in his meditations Miss Vivian re-entered. She had removed her hat, and Maitland observed how much better and more distinguished she looked without it. Her head was small and well poised, and her hair, though pale in color, was abundant, while the gentle composure of her manner and movements gave her dignity.

"I must not ask you to stay," she said, "I find Mrs. Miles so unwell, I must attend to her; and the dressmaker sent by Mrs. Winington is waiting for me."

"Then I will not trespass any longer; I hope to have another opportunity of seeing your drawings."

"If you know Mrs. Winington, I may see you at her house."

"I hope I shall, you are very good to have walked all this way with me. Good-bye; and tell me, what is your name? I did not heed Mr. Tilly when he introduced you."

"My name is Maitland."

"I think I did not notice your name, because I was taken up with the sort of likeness I saw about your eyes to my father's. Good-bye."

She held out her hand with a grave, kindly smile. Maitland took and lightly pressed it.

"If I can ever do anything for you," he exclaimed with a sudden impulse, "pray remember that I am at your service." Then, half ashamed of his speech, he made a rapid retreat.

"Every one is very good to me," was Edith Vivian's reflection, as she hurried away to the grand-looking dressmaker, of whom she was a little afraid, and submitted to the process of "trying on," having been previously measured under Mrs. Winington's eye. Faithful, however, to her suffering friend, she begged leave to show herself to Mrs. Miles before she took off the garment.

"Is it not pretty?" she exclaimed, drawing up the blind, that Mrs. Miles might see clearly. "The skirt is to be trimmed with a quantity of the same lace, and bows of brown satin ribbon; they look lovely against the tussore silk. This is called a simple morning-dress! It seems to me too fine to wear. I wonder what Mr. Dargan will say!"

"Ah! he won't mind now," returned Mrs. Miles, with a sigh so deep it was almost a groan, and would certainly

have attracted Edith's attention had she not been hurrying back to the dress-maker.

"You seem worse than you were this morning, dear Miley," she said, returning presently in her every-day dress; "and you look as if you had been crying."

"Well, you see the pain has been horrid bad, and I am that weak—" Here the poor woman broke down.

"I will get you some beef-tea and a glass of wine, and then I will try this wonderful stuff. It is a whitish stick, and it is to be rubbed on your brow till the pain goes," and Edith went swiftly and silently to and fro, procuring the remedies she had suggested, and Mrs. Miles grew more composed.

"Whatever will I do without you, Edith?—the sight of you does me good."

"I will not leave you till you are quite well and strong."

"Ay, but you must, my lamb. Brother Jos has been here while you were out"—a half suppressed sob.

"Oh!" cried Edith; "he has been here! Then he has been tormenting you. What did he say?"

"Well, he was a bit fidgety; but always anxious about *you*, missie, my dear. And do you know he has even been to see that Mrs. Winington about you?—and you are to go to her on Saturday. I am to be sent home, because this place doesn't suit me; so Jos says. He has grown wonderful careful of my health all at once"—in a querulous tone. "How he came to know such grand people as that Mrs. Winington and her brother is more than I can tell; anyhow they are very nice and civil-spoken."

"Yes, they are very delightful; but, dear Miley, I am not going to leave you, or to be ordered about by Mr. Dargan," cried Edith, indignantly.

"Ay, but you must, my dear. Jos is in real earnest about it. He had up the landlady, and gave her warning on the spot, and we are to be out of this, bag and baggage, by twelve o'clock on Saturday morning; so I wish you

would just write a line to Sarah, and tell her to have the fire alight in the little parlor, and be sure to have my bed well-aired—sheets and all. Though this is a vale of tears, one needn't suffer more than one can help."

"Well, Miley, I will not stay long; I will come soon to you."

"Ah! my dear, it's little I'll see of you from this time forth for evermore," cried Mrs. Miles, who was apt to grow scriptural in her sorrow.

"Why, where am I to be sent?" said Edith, laughing. "I can not be kept out of my own home."

"Ah! you'll soon be finding another home among all these fine gentlemen."

"They are too fine for me," said Edith, putting out her writing things. "I feel quite stupid among them. It will be a long time before I find another home."

And she began to write rapidly.

"Miley," she resumed, after a few minutes' pause, "you remember the other gentleman that Mr. Tilly introduced to us; I mean the dark one?"

"Yes; a quiet, grave man."

"I met him to-day, and he walked all the way back with me. I like him so much! He is serious and gentle; he does not seem to laugh at everything, like Mr. Beaton; and he speaks to me as if I were a reasonable being. I could tell him anything. It is curious, but he gives me the idea that he is sorry for me. He reminds me of my father when he used to look far away, and stroke my head, saying, 'Poor child, poor child!'"

"Well, missie, don't you go and trust any one too much, least of all a man; they are a selfish lot the best of them. Now, dear, I'll try and sleep a bit."

Edith Vivian had led a singularly secluded, monotonous life. She had been the sole companion of her widowed father, a silent, unconsciously selfish man, who had been reduced from easy circumstances to comparative poverty by

the failure of a bank, and who found absorbing occupation in botany and natural history. When he died, he left his little all to his daughter—a picturesque cottage in a wooded part of H——shire, and a couple of hundred a year; appointing his only friend, Mr. Tilly, and Mr. Tilly's oracle on business matters, Dargan, her guardians. Dargan, having a sister for whom he wished to provide without cost to himself, placed her in the cottage, and in charge of the little eleven-year-old orphan, as the cheapest mode of maintaining both. Fortunately, Mrs. Miles proved to be a tender-hearted, conscientious woman, and she lived happily with her young charge, who found ample amusement and occupation in field and garden, woodland and pebbly brook, in needle-work, and reading what books had belonged to her father. When she was about thirteen, Mrs. Miles so far overcame her dread of Josiah Dargan, her brother, as to clamor for some learning to be given to Miss Vivian, that she might be like other young ladies, and even reached the ear of that very distinguished and dusty antiquarian, Mr. Tilly, who did seriously incline to her prayer. So the prim, neat, elderly daughter of the late vicar, who was thankful for any chance of eking out her narrow income, was engaged at an infinitesimal salary, to impart instruction in English, French and the rudiments of music, to the little girl at the cottage.

Edith was not particularly studious, nor was the teaching calculated to interest her. Still she gathered some information, especially on the subjects which took her fancy.

About two years before the beginning of this narrative, her uncle died intestate, and she became the owner of considerable wealth.

Edith herself knew little or nothing about it. Mr. Tilly had told her she would now be well off, but no alteration had been made in her mode of life.

To Dargan, this change in his ward's circumstances was a positive torment. His grasping fingers itched to clutch

some of the riches they could touch, but not take while the dread of discovery held him back. His imagination constantly pictured Edith running off with some shrewd fortune-hunter, who would not only gather up every farthing of both the principal and accumulations of this latter inheritance, but make him, Dargan, disgorge the considerable pickings he had contrived to get, even out of the miserable two hundred a year he had so long manipulated. To find a suitable(?) husband for his ward before she reached the independence of majority, was the object nearest his heart, and as Edith approached eighteen, his feverish unrest drove him to the expedient we have recorded.

It was a trial to Edith to part with Mrs. Miles, who, though somewhat better, physically, was terribly depressed in spirit; and it was also something of a trial to go to Mrs. Winington's, but a trial not unmixed with pleasure.

Though all her life a recluse, Edith Vivian was not shy; she was naturally brave, and disposed to trust her fellow-creatures. She was also singularly free from self-consciousness, and her extreme ignorance of life and society liberated her from many of the doubts and fears which would have beset a less complete novice.

"I will write often, and tell you everything; you may be sure I will! You know I love writing; and do—do write to me! If you are not well I will come to you, I *will*, whatever Mr. Dargan chooses to say." So with many kisses Edith bade her good old companion farewell, and took her seat in the respectable-looking brougham which, to her surprise, had been engaged by Mr. Dargan's direction to convey her to South Kensington. On her way there her imagination was chiefly occupied in picturing Mrs. Miles's arrival at the little homely cottage. How lonely she would feel! How Snap the terrier and the colly would welcome her, and then look about for their mistress and playfellow! Well, she would go to them as soon as she had gathered some knowledge of drawing, and persuaded her

guardians to let her return next spring for a long spell of study!

Mrs. Winington was at home and alone to receive her. She was ushered into that lady's private sitting-room, a delightful apartment, looking into a large public garden, and furnished with all that could charm the eye and contribute to luxurious ease.

"Ah, Miss Vivian! I am so pleased to see you," cried Mrs. Winington, rising to greet her with great cordiality. "It is really very good of Mr. Tilly to trust you with me! But we shall take great care of you!"—and she drew forward a low easy-chair. "You are looking pale and tired; I am sure you must be moped to death."

"You are very, very kind to ask me here," said Edith, earnestly. "I am so different from you that I may be tiresome, but—"

"I shall turn you out with inexorable cruelty if you are!" interrupted Mrs. Winington, laughing; "but I do not anticipate such a catastrophe! Now you must leave all *tristesse* behind you; and do you know your eyes look suspiciously like tears!"

"Yes, I did cry a little," said Edith, coloring. "I was so sorry to see Mrs. Miles go away alone; I have never been away from her since she came to me, nearly seven years ago."

"Very sweet and nice of you, dear, but it is time you broke away from this incongruous companionship. That good old woman was only fit to be your nurse! You need not discard her, but you have been shamefully neglected, and kept in the background. Now you must be introduced to society suited to your fortune and position."

"I am afraid I am not suited to any society, except that of a few people whom I like and understand. It is a great pleasure for me to look at you and listen to you; I wonder if I shall ever be able to paint you!" said Edith, with

simple earnestness. Mrs. Winington was not so blinded by her natural and acquired worldliness as not to perceive and be flattered by this honest and unstinted admiration.

"I wish you a better subject," she said, laughing. "Now, come with me, and I will show you your room before luncheon. Madame Laure has sent some of your things, and I see you have put on one of her dresses."

Edith followed her hostess upstairs, to a pretty comfortable room, where was laid out what seemed to Edith an enormous amount of clothes—clothes, too, of a superb description. Delicate silks, gauzy grenadines, fairy-like hats, coquettish mantles. "What a quantity of money they must have cost!" she cried, aghast. "What *will* Mr. Dargan say!"

"That you have a right to the common necessaries requisite for a young lady who is to live like other people," said Mrs. Winington, carelessly ringing the bell as she spoke. Her summons was almost immediately answered by a grave, well-dressed young woman. "There, my dear Miss Vivian, is your especial maid! She will attend to your toilet, and she understands her business. Markham, you had better do Miss Vivian's hair before luncheon; she has been living shut up in the country, and I trust to you to do her justice."

At luncheon the only guest was Beaton, who did his best to be fascinating; and then came a crowning joy. Mrs. Winington's smart Victoria conveyed them to a studio quite near, where Edith satisfied her eyes with the drawings, water-colors, casts, and beautiful objects scattered about, while Mrs. Winington arranged terms with the fashionable artist, who condescended to instruct a few pupils for a high remuneration. It was settled that Edith should commence the following Monday. Some shopping in Regent and Bond streets and a drive in the Park completed the day; and Edith, exhilarated by the unusual movement and variety, found herself quite equal to the

ceremony of dinner, as she had never seen dinner served before; and introduction to Colonel Winington, who was quite ready to accept his wife's new favorite unquestioningly, as he never interfered with her so long as she left him alone, and did not spend too outrageous a quantity of money.

Meanwhile, Jack Maitland still loitered in town, dissatisfied with himself, yet unwilling to leave. He was strong and penetrating enough to be not one whit blinded to Mrs. Winington's real nature, and yet her beauty, her grace, her evident desire to atone in some way for her past heartlessness, dazzled and fascinated him.

That a brilliant woman of fashion, courted and admired as she was, should still remember her first uncouth boyish lover, and show him that she did so with undisguised tenderness, was enough to make a fool of most men. Jack had long ago ceased to feel the smallest anger against her. He was naturally generous and broad, but not easily melted, and there was a dash of contempt in the plenary absolution he had extended to bonny Jean Beaton.

"Why should I dislike her for being what she is, rather than what I thought her?" had been his reflection years back, when he began to work his way out of the chaos into which she had plunged him; and however attractive she might still be, the core of his opinion was unaltered and unalterable. But Mrs. Winington's beauty and softness appealed to the senses, and Maitland's were still fresh and keen. He could not help the resisted consciousness that his old love was not indisposed to sob out her penitence in his arms, and he knew—none better—how sweet those ripe red lips of hers used to be in the delightfully delusive old days, when they wandered together among the "banks and braes" of Craigrothie.

He therefore found it very pleasant to drop in to luncheon, and oftener still to tea, though he scarcely went as often as he was asked. It is true that Mrs. Winington was frequently surrounded; but there were occasional hours of

quiet *tête-à-tête* talk, chiefly retrospective, which he could not help enjoying.

Indeed Maitland often wondered what she saw in a plain and somewhat unpolished man like himself to find worth fascinating. Still that process was agreeably exciting, though he was often ungrateful enough when leaving her to be dimly thankful she was not his wife.

There was now a fresh motive for his visits to Fairfield Gardens. He was anxious to see how Beaton's suit prospered. How the little field flower bore the atmosphere of the splendid hot-house into which she had been transplanted.

Mrs. Winington was dispensing tea to Lady Mary Hay, Beaton, Miss Vivian, a youthful Guardsman, and a very thick-set, elderly man, with a small allowance of neck, who breathed with a snoring sound, and drank his tea noisily.

Miss Vivian was sitting a little apart busy with some fancy work. Maitland could hardly believe that dress could have so improved any face and figure without destroying its individuality. A gown of soft, creamy material all ruffled with foamy lace; her soft hair piled on the top of her head, meeting a fringe of tiny curls parted on her brow; a tea-rose and spray of fern against her neck. She looked like a modest primrose, and had in no way lost her air of delicate quaintness. Maitland felt a sense of refreshment as his eyes fell upon her, and she met them with a sudden brightening of her own as she rose to meet him with an honest unconcealed expression of pleasure.

"Mr. Maitland, I thought you had left town," cried Mrs. Winington, holding out her hand. "What has become of you?—and what have we done that you should cut us in this way?"

"I have been wandering to and fro, as usual, and feeling a good deal bored," returned Maitland, making his way to Miss Vivian after greeting Lady Mary and Beaton. "I scarcely knew you as I came in," he said; "such a complete transformation is confusing."

"Yes," said Beaton, "you can see that Jean's reforming fingers have swept the lines where rust had lingered."

"Really, Leslie, you are absolutely brutal!—to associate rust with anything half so ethereal as Edith is too absurd," exclaimed Mrs. Winington.

"The necessities of rhythm obliged me to curtail the word rustic or rusticity. Miss Vivian is strong enough to bear the truth from her most appreciative ally. May I not say so?"

This, in a caressing tone and with a lingering glance.

"Indeed you may! Any one can see I am a rustic, and will most probably always be a rustic," said Edith, answering the first part of his speech with a good-humored smile. "But I should be dull indeed if Mrs. Winington could not improve me."

Then the conversation became general, and plans were made for taking Miss Vivian to Windsor, and a dinner at Richmond.

"And what do you think of the theater?" asked Maitland, who had drawn a chair beside Miss Vivian.

"I like it better than anything else except the studio, and even better than that sometimes," she said earnestly. "I can not sleep afterward, it seems so real to me; I think over it, and feel so glad the people are made happy at last. I have never seen a tragedy; I do not think I could bear one."

"You had better realize the unreality of the drama before you risk it," returned Maitland smiling. "And how is Mrs. Miles? I trust she is better."

"I hope so—I think so; at least she does not complain in her letters; but she must be lonely and melancholy without me. But I shall go back to her when the studio closes."

"When may that be?"

"At the end of July."

"And how are you getting on?"

"Slowly, very slowly; yet I have some hope I may draw pretty well yet. Will you come to the studio one day with Mr. Beaton? He is so kind; he often comes to bring me back in time for luncheon. Mrs. Winington always likes me to be back for luncheon. Is it not good of Mr. Beaton?"

"Very good, indeed," returned Maitland, while with eyes cast down he thought—"He has made no impression as yet; her unconsciousness proves that." "Then you must be very well employed; with art in the morning, and gadding about the rest of the day?" he added aloud.

"Mrs. Winington would make any one happy, and I never knew what it was to live before. I was happy enough, but only half awake."

"Then have you turned your back on the humdrum routine of country life forever?"

"No! I should not like to live quite as Mrs. Winington does. I like to go to bed when she goes out in the evening; but I love the theater and the picture-galleries and driving in the Park. Then every one is very good to me, only I do not always understand what they are talking about. I am never quite sure if they are in earnest. Of course I am very ignorant. I believe I should be happier in the country. I mean to have my home there."

"There is little that is home-like in London life," said Maitland; and after a pause he asked, "Who is the stout gentleman?"

"He is a friend of Lady Mary's; she brought him here a few days ago. He is a Mr. Brown, I think; but Lady Mary calls him by some funny name. He has lived a long time in China, I think, and he is very rich."

"What treason are you and Maitland hatching?" said Beaton, coming over to interrupt them. "My sister suggests that we should all dine at the Healtheries this evening, and listen to the German band. Will you come, Maitland?"

"Yes, you must," cried Mrs. Winington. "We shall want three gentlemen; Colonel Winington dines out, and I shall be all unguarded if you will not come and take care of me."

Of course Maitland consented.

It was a soft, clear, delicious night, and after a pleasant dinner and much lively talk they strolled about the gardens; Beaton escorting Miss Vivian; Lady Mary, somewhat to Maitland's surprise, pairing off with the Chinaman; while he himself fell to Mrs. Winington's share. How beautiful she looked in the moonlight, or when her large speaking eyes glittered in the gleam of the lamps! How brightly she talked! What subtle touches of tenderness sounded through her lighter tone!—and yet Maitland was unusually indifferent. His imagination would stray away after Edith Vivian and the man who had appropriated her. Was he teaching her to love him, with the finished art of long experience?—and when he had won her heart, and annexed her money, how would he repay her? The sense of profoundest pity, of guilt even—for did not his knowledge of the whole scheme make him an accomplice?—oppressed him, and he was powerless to assist her. She was so defenseless, so friendless! Why, it would be better for her to marry him. He would be a kind and loyal friend, though he could never love any other woman as he had the charming, dazzling creature whose hand lay on his arm, who half angered, half fascinated him. Even while he looked down into her appealing eyes, the recollection of Edith's, with their quiet, truthful, steadfast expression; the delicate simplicity of her manner; the interest of her pensive, changeful face, came back to him refreshingly, like the breeze from a field of new-mown hay over the heated atmosphere of a richly perfumed conservatory.

Mrs. Winington's voice recalled him.

"Your judgment was the right one," she was saying. "Your little protege is really very nice. Naturally a lady,

but so frightfully neglected, she does not seem to take Leslie's love-making in and he is really most persevering. I think if she were a little responsive he would grow quite fond of her. Really men are so accustomed to be made love to now that—" she paused.

"It must be rather an agreeable change to do the love-making one's self," said Maitland, laughing.

"To men like you, yes!—but, joking apart, I am really interested in Miss Vivian. I never imagined I could like any other girl so much! She is not stupid by any means, but so strangely unconventional! Her genuine admiration for me is very amusing, and extremely flattering. I wish Leslie could get on with her more quickly. I want them to be married before we go down to Winford. Really, Leslie is nearly at the utmost ends of his resources."

"And suppose Miss Vivian proves so unenlightened as not to appreciate Beaton?"

"Now, Jack"—with a deprecating glance, "do not be a prophet of evil. She *must* marry him! Oh!"—interrupting herself—"here they are." The separated party had drifted together at the illuminated fountain.

"Dearest Jean," said Lady Mary, in an aside quite audible to Maitland. "I can not stand 'Go bang' any longer! Do take him off my hands, and let me have a turn with your brother, otherwise you will see me a petrified corpse at your feet."

So for the rest of the evening Miss Vivian was in Maitland's charge, and both felt that it was the better part.

CHAPTER V.

REPULSED.

THE days took to themselves wings—wings of pleasure, the less self-indulgent because refined—and flew away with not surprising rapidity. Mrs. Winington was su-

premely content. It was no longer difficult to attract Jack Maitland to her house. He was ready to come on the lightest provocation. The slow-moving bill on which he had so long waited, had at last been before the committee; he had given his evidence, and was free to return to his native wilds—yet he lingered.

dir[illegible]as still calm and undemonstrative, but Mrs. [illegible]nington knew him in the days when he had not acquired his present self-mastery, and could not believe that the old fire which once burned so strongly was quite extinguished or exhausted, and she found an absorbing interest in the endeavor to rekindle the flame. Never had she been so generally kind and considerate. Edith thought her an angel disguised in a fashionable exterior. Her brother rejoiced in the spell of sunshine, though he had a shrewd idea why "Jeanie was so deucedly amiable." While Maitland found his imagination less and less occupied with Mrs. Winington's lovely, loving eyes; her smiling, kissable lips; and the sweet, half-playful, half-tender expressions that fell from them, other thoughts, other imaginings, replaced these. Yet, though he could not tear himself away, he was miserable, uneasy, self-reproachful. He watched with keenest perception every move in the game of which Edith Vivian was the unconscious prize. He saw too clearly the utter indifference which underlay Beaton's attentions and apparent devotion; he fancied that some instinctive recognition of this was at the root of Miss Vivian's easy, unmoved friendliness. For Beaton was a favorite with women, and what was there to guard that simple, untaught, trusting girl from his influence, but instinct?

One question racked him by day and by night. Was he bound by his knowledge of the facts to tell the true state of affairs to Miss Vivian, and so destroy Beaton's chance?—or ought he to be loyal to the friend who had trusted him from the first? He could not answer it; yet he was convinced that the forlorn little heiress was gently floating down-

stream to her certain misery. She could never be satisfied with such a life as Mrs. Winington's. She needed a real home to be a shelter from sun or storm; a husband who would go hand in hand with her through every step of life's road; and what with self-tormenting and pity and perpetual watching, Jack Maitland soon grew to think there could not be a fairer lot than to be that husband.

Though Miss Vivian was generally handed over to Beaton in the many parties and expeditions organized by Mrs. Winington, Maitland found opportunities for conversation more frequently than Mrs. Winington noticed, and these confirmed him in his idea that Edith's was no common nature, nor was her gentleness in any way weak. There was something touching in the quiet preference she unconsciously showed him, and which completed her attraction. He felt, without the slightest disrespect to her, that had he a fair field he might have won her heart and made her happier than Leslie Beaton ever could. Her girlish curiosity and frank questioning about himself, his history, his people, half amused him. Had he both father and mother alive?—and sisters?—he was rich indeed! A mother must be so delightful!—some one who would always love you, even if you did wrong. "Mrs. Winington was like a mother and elder sister in one; but," added Edith looking down, "I feel in an odd way that some time or other I shall pass out of her life, and she out of mine; the longer I know her, the more I see how unlike we are, and when she has time to see it too, she will not like to be bored."

"At present you are a prime favorite, so let the morrow take care of itself," returned Maitland; "you are too natural and truthful to bore any one."

"Do you think so? I am very glad"—looking candidly into his face; and Maitland thought how charming it would be to see those eyes avoid his with the dawning consciousness of love—love for him only.

Time, however, waits neither for men nor their wooing,

and Beaton thought he had served long enough for his Rachel; so regardless of his sister's warning not to be rash, and without her knowledge, he persuaded Miss Vivian to stay at home one afternoon in order to see some photographs of Hungarian scenery, which afforded him an excuse for a *tête-à-tête;* and then to Edith's immense surprise, with much fervor made her an offer of his hand and heart, his ancient name and high social position.

When Mrs. Winington returned sooner than was expected she found her brother pacing to and fro in deepest anger and despair.

"The ignorant little savage!" he exclaimed. "I made the loveliest confession of my feelings you can imagine. It would have melted the heart of a—of a Calmuck, and the little fiend was simply surprised, confused, overwhelmed; yet she told me coolly she thought I had mistaken my own feelings—that she was quite sure I liked Lady Mary better than I did herself! that she was too—too something or other to be my wife, and that she liked me so much she would rather marry some one else."

"Well, Leslie, you are a greater fool than I took you for," said his sister, frowning sternly.

Could it be the same face that looked up so tenderly in Jack Maitland's?

"You tried to shake the tree before the fruit was ripe, now you have lost the game. What do you intend to do?"

"To do! How do you mean? I have acted on your instructions, and made an ass of myself to no purpose. I have scarcely a rap left, and Father Abraham, who advanced me the last supply on the strength of having an heiress in tow, won't give me a sou more. By heaven, I shall lose my character if it is known that I have failed with the unsophisticated one."

"You must *not* fail," Mrs. Winington returned, "I must repair your mistake; you shall *not* lose this little

simpleton. By your own idiotic rashness you will lose much valuable time. I wonder I have the patience to speak to you; you have been a trouble to us all your life, and you have nearly thrown away your last chance of relieving us of the burden. *Now*, you must be absolutely guided by me."

"If you explain your plans I'll try and take them in," said Beaton, who was considerably crest-fallen.

"Very well. Leave Miss Vivian to me for the present. I will describe your broken-hearted condition, and rouse her compassion. There is a good deal to hope still from the fact that she accused you of liking Lady Mary better than you liked her."

"She is not far wrong," murmured Beaton.

"Do not be childish, Leslie. If you married Lady Mary you would hate each other, and be miserable in two months."

"I should have those two months, though."

"Lady Mary has more sense," continued Mrs. Winington, not heeding him. "You see, though it must be distasteful to her, she has made up her mind to marry Mr. Brown."

"Has old 'Go bang' proposed?" cried Beaton, eagerly.

"I don't know, and I don't care, I have enough to think of with your affairs and mismanagement. You must go out of sight somewhere; it will be the best and safest way to show your despair."

"But, Jean, I can not stir without cash, and I tell you I haven't a farthing. You must get Winington to shell out."

"It would be of no use to ask him, and I would not do it if it were," returned his sister, resolutely. "Winington has been very generous, but you have tried his patience too far. I don't think I could have had you so much here had he not believed you would marry Edith Vivian, aud free us from the burden of your maintenance. I want his help

myself; I have gone far beyond my allowance; Madame Laure has sent me in a hideous bill."

"Then you must give me some cash yourself," said Beaton, indifferently. "Look here"—he pulled a handful of gold, silver, and copper coins from his pocket—"I have a couple of five-pound notes in my dressing-case besides, and that is all between me and destitution. If I run over to Paris, or down to Cowes, I must run up a hotel bill into the bargain."

"You shall not run over to Paris or Cowes, Leslie," she interrupted; "you shall go down and bury your woes and yourself at Winford, and I will lend you your railway fare."

"Great heavens, Jean!—you *are* determined to make me repent my false step. What on earth am I to do at Winford? I shall cut my throat."

"Better do that than live on a beggerly gentleman," cried Mrs. Winington. "How any one can submit to poverty, when a shilling's worth of poison or an ounce of lead would deliver you, is incomprehensible to me. However, I don't mean to keep you long in exile; there is tolerable fishing."

"I hate fishing," ejaculated Beaton.

"Old Mrs. Gubbins the housekeeper is a very fair cook, and you must write me despairing letters every day—that will occupy you. In a week or two I will bring our little startled fawn to hear reason, then you can come back and do exactly as I bid you."

"Very well; I suppose I may go and confess my sins to Lady Mary before I start."

"It will do you no good."

"Ought we to communicate with that old screw, Dargan?"

"I will think about it," said Mrs. Winington, slowly. "I may ultimately need his help; but if we tell him too soon it might set him on the lookout for some better spec than *you* have proved."

"Ah! then I may leave Dargan to you. And I suppose you have no more to say?"

"No; and it would be a relief not to see you. I never was so angry with you before. Really, Edith Vivian is a great deal too good for you; she has more sense. I suspect you have been betraying your absurd fancy for Lady Mary more recklessly than I imagine, to rouse Edith's suspicions."

"Not more recklessly than you have shown your absurd fancy for Jack Maitland. If I were Winington—"

"You would be a better man than you are," interrupted Mrs. Winington, quietly; but her eyes darkened and she grew pale with anger—"and not put evil constructions on a simple natural liking for an old friend."

Beaton laughed aloud cynically.

"If you defy and irritate me," said his sister, rising and standing erect before him, "I shall give you up; hitherto I have been weak enough to care what became of you. If I turn against you, it will be an exceedingly bad day for you, Leslie Beaton." She opened her purse and threw him a couple of notes. "I expect you to repay me, remember. Now go; I will write to Gubbins in time for post, and tell her to have luncheon ready for you at one to-morrow. "You must get away by the 8.30 train in the morning."

She turned from him with a look of contempt, and left the room.

Leslie Beaton followed slowly, and bent his steps to the residence of Mrs. Hay, a severe and wealthy dowager, under whose rather oppressive protection Lady Mary, her daughter-in-law, thought fit for the present to abide.

Mrs. Winington paused in her own sitting-room, and took up some notes and letters, glancing through them mechanically. "I will not speak to her yet," she thought. "Let her chew the cud of sweet and bitter reflection for awhile. What a misfortune to have two such idiots to deal with! Edith's utter ignorance of life, not to say society,

prevents her from seeing that she could scarcely do better than marry Leslie. He would make a very tolerable sort of husband, and *I* could be of immense use to her. As to Leslie, his weakness is too contemptible. How did I come to have such a brother!"

She wrote a few replies to the notes she had read, stopping now and then to think, and descended to the carriage which all this time had been slowly driven to and fro by the exasperated but sedate coachman, whose patience was often tried by his whimsical and imperious mistress.

Meantime Edith, much disturbed and bewildered, had flown away to her own room, and locking the door, sat down in the darkest corner she could find, trying to steady her thoughts after the extraordinary avowal to which she had just listened. Her most vivid impression was immense astonishment that any man should think of her as a wife, especially a man so clever and indifferent to everything as Beaton appeared to be. Edith had a very humble opinion of herself; not that she was uneasy or self-conscious about her deficiencies—self did not trouble her in any way. She wanted to learn and to enjoy, to help where she could, and do what her hand found to do diligently. The fact of being an heiress had never penetrated to her understanding; she had never known what it was to have the command of money. Even Mrs. Miles, who was mysteriously in awe of her careful brother, never told her she was rich, only that she need not want for anything. Indeed, Mrs. Miles was kept very much in the dark herself; she was an honest, kindly, warm-hearted woman, somewhat indolent and inert. Edith consequently did a great deal more for her than she did for her young charge, and thus the girl grew up singularly unspoiled, and without the least idea that she was of importance to any one except Mrs. Miles. Moreover, she thought herself too plain to be attractive when she thought on the subject at all, which was perhaps never, until dress and adornment was forced on her notice by

Mrs. Winington. When comparing herself with two such distinguished-looking women as Lady Mary Hay and her hostess, she decided that her own appearance was poor indeed.

Few girls had ever dreamed less of love and marriage. She had read few novels, and heard less gossip. There was really no one to gossip about at Littlemere. The lovers she had read about in Sir Walter Scott's and Miss Ferrier's stories interested her immensely; but if she ever applied the moral of the tales to herself, it was in the far-away future, when she had emerged from the very low mental status which she allowed herself.

To be kind, considerate, prompt to do any one a service, seemed to Edith a natural and normal state of feeling, and she was too ignorant of life, as it works in the society into which she had drifted so curiously, to understand what was implied by the extraordinary exertion made by Beaton to meet her at the studio, to inspect her progress, and escort her home as he did two or three times a week. Such attentions from a man of Beaton's style and standing would have fluttered all or any of the season's *debutantes,* or even more experienced young ladies; while to Edith it seemed the simplest thing in the world that her guardian's old friend, as she considered him, her dear, delightful Mrs. Winington's brother, should take a kindly, perhaps patronizing, interest in herself and her work. She was heartily obliged to Beaton, but slightly distrustful of him, because he seemed to mock at all things; and whenever she took in the drift of his compliments, and that they were really meant for her, she was disposed to think he was laughing at her.

When, therefore, he made an avowal of his ardent affection and profound desire to make her his wife, she was instinctively incredulous, and more frightened than pleased. Why should so grand a gentleman want to marry an ignorant little girl, who was not even pretty?—it was

quite incomprehensible! Inexperienced as she was, she had caught the expression of his eyes from time to time as he looked at or spoke to Lady Mary; and nature, that marvelous instructress, told her he must be very fond of her attractive ladyship. Now all their pleasant, easy intercourse was at an end, and she really liked Beaton. It would indeed be painful to meet him and Mrs. Winington. What would she say? Edith felt rather than thought than it was quite possible Mrs. Winington could be very angry, and what more likely to anger her than finding her brother, to whom she was so much attached, and of whom, as it seemed to Edith, she was so proud, had proposed to a little countrified simpleton, which in itself was bad enough, and worse still that she had had the temerity to refuse him! What should she do if Mrs. Winington was cross and quarreled with her? Though by no means captivated by a life of restless excitement, she felt she could not go back to her former monotonous existence. And her guardians? What would Mr. Tilly say? Beaton had intimated that he had secured her guardian's consent. Would every one be very angry? Then she wondered why she did not like to marry Mr. Beaton. It was curious, for he was nice and good-looking. Next, fancy suggested, "If Mr. Maitland had asked you to be his wife, would you have refused?" Conscience instantly answered, "No." Of course, *he* would never think of asking her. He was far above, out of her reach. It was with no passionate burst of emotion that Edith recognized this; she was not in love with Maitland, or rather she did not know she was in love, and with a sigh of gentle regret she turned from the idea, blushing at her temerity.

At last her maid tapped at the door to say that Mrs. Winington had come in, and wished to know if Miss Vivian would not have tea.

"No, thank you, I have a bad headache, and will lie down till dinner-time," said Edith, beginning to realize the

appalling trial before her in meeting Mrs. Winington's keen eyes with such a secret weighing on her soul.

"Shall I bring you a cup of tea here, miss?"

"If you please," returned Edith, eager to be left alone; nor was she disturbed for a long time.

Then Mrs. Winington broke in upon her, on the way from her dressing-room to the carriage and a solemn dinner-party. She rarely took her young protegee out with her in the evening, save to the theater or a concert.

"Is your head better, dear?" she asked kindly, but to Edith's anxious ear there was unusual gravity, almost sadness, in her tone.

"Oh, yes! certainly better."

"I have brought you the new 'Cornhill,' if you are able to read. Try and eat some dinner or supper, and get to bed early; I hope to find you quite well to-morrow morning. Good-night, dear."

A gentle kiss, accompanied by a sigh, and Mrs. Winington was gone.

Edith seldom saw her hostess in the morning before she went to the studio, where she worked steadily, in spite of the distractions which surrounded her, and where, perhaps, she was happiest. Her uneasiness and fearful looking forward to the meeting that awaited her was prolonged, after a disturbed night, through the hours that preceded luncheon.

Beaton had disappeared; only the well-dressed, self-possessed young person who deigned to be her attendant came to escort her back. This was no small relief.

At luncheon there was only Mrs. Winington, who received her kindly, but with a subdued and pensive air. "You must have communicated your headache to me, Edith," she said, after they had exchanged greetings. "I feel quite good for nothing; I shall not be at home to any one, and at five we will take a drive 'far from the madding

crowd.' There are a few people coming to dinner, and I must brace myself for my duties."

"It will be very pleasant," said Edith, scarcely daring to look up, yet thankful to find that Mrs. Winington was not cross.

Luncheon was soon dispatched; Edith could hardly eat a morsel.

"It is a farce your sitting down to table," said her hostess. "You are looking pale, too, dear. You must really see Doctor Tweddell. He is the great man for nerves now, and your nerves are all wrong, I am sure."

"I think I do feel nervous," faltered Edith.

"Come with me; we will repose ourselves in my room, and have a nice long talk."

Edith followed her as if to execution.

Mrs. Winington's private room was a delightful apartment on the second floor, with a large corner window commanding the gardens in the rear, and a glimpse of Hyde Park; simply though most comfortably furnished, and adorned with a few good pictures, a statuette or two, and abundant flowers in choice china bowls and vases. It was deliciously cool and fresh; the roar of the streets came to them softened into a mellow under-tone, deepening the sense of restfulness by the suggestion of the noise and struggle without.

"It is certainly delightful to be quiet sometimes," said Mrs. Winington, sinking into a chair beside the open window, and pointing to one opposite, where the light would fall upon Edith, who obediently took the seat indicated. "I know you have a great deal to tell me, a great deal you *ought* to tell me," began Mrs. Winington, slowly fanning herself with a large Japanese fan: "but it is difficult to begin, so I am going to help you. My brother has told me that you refused him, and I am awfully sorry about it all."

"So am I," said Edith, coloring, and pressing her hands

tightly together, her usual tranquil composure melting away under Mrs. Winington's searching eyes. "I have been dreadfully distressed, and so afraid you would be angry with me."

"Angry with you! Why should I be angry? Grieved and disappointed, I own, but not angry! In such a serious matter you have the right to do what you think best. But I am, of course, very, very sorry for poor Leslie! You *seemed* to like him, you know, and perhaps unconsciously misled him."

"But, Mrs. Winington, dear Mrs. Winington," imploringly, "I did, I do like him; only I never dreamed he would think of marrying me! I am sure *you* did not."

"I did not *think* it, because I knew some weeks ago that he ardently desired to make you his wife."

"And you were not vexed? you did not think him foolish?" cried Edith, in increasing astonishment.

"No, dear! Listen to me, Edith. I suppose I seem to you too worldly and hard to appreciate a simple original character? I *am* worldly. I have hard edges here and there, but where I take a liking I am steady, for I do not adopt any one on a mere whim. Now there is much in you that would be of infinite use to my brother. He took to you at *once* and that is an unusual thing for him. He has a most warm heart, though I acknowledge he has been far from steady, but that is past and gone now. I looked to his marriage with you to complete his life and character. I am therefore wofully disappointed when my pretty little castle in the air crumbled at the touch of your cruel fingers."

Edith did not answer for a moment, she was so overwhelmed with a sense of her own guilt.

"You are too good, too indulgent to me," she said at length, brokenly. "I scarcely believed Mr. Beaton could be in earnest. I do not think I could ever feel quite at

home with him, and I fancied he was very fond of Lady Mary Hay, which seemed much more natural."

"Of Lady Mary?" echoed Mrs. Winington. "How very absurd! They are very old friends, and in a sense he is very fond of her; but when I tell you that he was rejoicing the day before yesterday at the prospect of her making a good marriage, you may imagine the kind of fondness he feels for her."

There was a pause.

"My greatest regret," began Edith again, "is to have disappointed you in any way. You have done so much for me, and I love you, indeed I do."

The color rose brightly in her cheeks, and her quiet truthful eyes looked into Mrs. Winington's with such pathetic earnestness that she was touched, and she thought that real hearty love and belief were worth deserving, even from an obscure little country girl. But she repressed sentimental weakness at once.

"I hope you care for me a little, Edith. I think I deserve it from you. But not so much as Leslie. Could you have seen him yesterday, I think you *would* have been sorry for him. He was so broken-hearted, and struggled so bravely to control himself! 'Whatever happens, Jean,' he said, 'do not worry Edith, do not in any way resent *my* disappointment.' You see, he knows how fond I am of him. He talks of joining a friend of his who is going to make an exploring expedition to Tartary, or Thibet, or Timbuctoo, but I earnestly hope he will not. Though his general health is good, he could not stand the hardships of such an undertaking. Indeed I did not believe that Leslie could have felt anything so intensely; he was as white as a sheet." Mrs. Winington fanned herself vehemently, as if much moved.

Edith's eyes grew larger and larger as she listened, her sense of the evil she had wrought deepened, and her in-

stinctive incredulity vanished before the gravity of Mrs. Winington's looks and tones.

To doubt a syllable of what that incomparable personage asserted never crossed her mind, still it was most incomprehensible. Yet the image conjured up by Mrs. Winington's description affected her deeply. She trembled, and the tears rose to her eyes.

"I wish I had never come to be a trouble to you!" she sobbed. "What a return this is for all your goodness, and Mr. Beaton's goodness! I am very grateful to him for caring so much about me, but—"

"Oh, I suppose he could not help *that*," interrupted Mrs. Winington, with a sad smile. "I know that some little time ago he explained his intentions fully to your guardians, and secured their full consent, so that no difficulty should occur in case he could win yours."

"What shall I do? what shall I do?" said Edith, unconsciously aloud.

"Are you in earnest when you ask what you shall do? Edith?" asked Mrs. Winington; "and will you believe that I am disinterested in the advice I offer?"

"Believe *you?* Of course I believe you thoroughly!"

"Then let matters stand as they are. Poor Leslie has run away to bury himself in solitude. I begged him to go down to Winford, for I know my old housekeeper will take care of him. You need not meet for some little time. Think well if you have done wisely in rejecting the warm heart so freely offered to you; think of the charming home your united means might create. With my brother you would do exactly as you liked; he has the happiest temper. Then my friendship and help in the little social minutiæ of which you would be unavoidably ignorant, counts for something. There, I will not allow myself to speak more. I would not for worlds overpersuade you. But, for your own sake, do not throw my brother over without some consider-

ation. Of course it is very likely he may not come near us again while you are here. But should he do so—"

She paused, and poor Edith, who felt as if some invisible net was closing round her, urged, timidly:

"I suppose one ought to like the man you marry very much?"

"You should certainly not *dis*like him! But why do you not like Leslie? Do you love any one else?" with a sudden, almost fiercely questioning glance.

"How could I? Whom do I know to love?" asked Edith, timidly.

"Very true! Moreover, it does not follow that because I think my brother the dearest fellow in the world, he must be irresistible to every one. There, I really think we have exhausted the subject, and you have made your eyes red. Go and bathe them, dear, and do not be unhappy; I shall always be your friend."

"Ah! do, do be my friend—I have so few;" and Edith ventured to pass her arm through Mrs. Winington's, and to press her brow against her shoulder, with more of a caress than she had ever dared before.

"Oh, rest tranquil, my dear girl. I am very loyal."

Edith hurried away, and Mrs. Winington, rising to fetch a French novel from the table, looked after her with a slight sigh.

"She is a nice little thing, and I do hope, when I have done Leslie's love-making successfully for him, he will not neglect her too openly, and spend her money too freely; I will see *that* tied up safely at any rate!"

CHAPTER VI.

MANEUVERING.

WHILE Mrs. Winington fulfilled her diplomatic mission, Jack Maitland had been reasoning with himself against his own weakness in yielding to his strong inclination to prolong

his stay within Mrs. Winington's charmed circle. He could in no way help Edith, he told himself, and each day they met only increased his miserable anxiety and indecision.

However keen her natural perception of truth and reality, so accomplished a man of the world as Beaton would end by convincing her that he was worthy all trust and affection. So he mused as he was returning from an expedition to Hampton Court with his New Zealand friends, who had complained loudly that they never saw anything of him, that he had quite cut them, etc., etc.

"I must dine at the Winingtons to-night," he thought, when, having seen his companions into a cab, he was walking slowly toward Waterloo Bridge, "but I will get away home on Saturday. I am making a fool of myself here."

On reaching his hotel, however, he found a letter which compelled even an earlier start. It was from Major Maitland, informing him that his mother had taken a chill, and had been attacked with severe bronchitis; that although there was no very immediate danger, it would be well if he could return home at once. Maitland was startled, something in the tone of the communication alarmed him.

Mrs. Maitland was a gentle, fragile woman. When her younger son was in disgrace with all the world she had clung to him, and written to him, and scraped small gifts of money out of her very narrow house allowance to help him in his hour of need. This Jack never forgot. He loved his mother with all the strength of his steady heart. He knew that his father, although considered a model husband, was tyrannical and unsympathetic. He would no doubt bitterly lament his loss, were his wife to be taken from him, and canonize her in his memory, but in the meantime he never entered into her thoughts or feelings, or considered the needs of her inner nature. Her daughters were married, and provided with cares of their own, and Jack well knew the loneliness of the patient little woman when *he* was not with her.

There was time enough to eat a morsel of dinner, pay his bill, and start by the 8:30 train from King's Cross. He could thus reach home by noon next day, and he was determined not to leave it till he saw his mother restored to her ordinary health. He wrote a hasty line of excuse to Mrs. Winington, and with a heavy heart, both for the cares he was leaving behind and those he was going to meet, was soon speeding northward as fast as steam could take them.

Mrs. Winington's dinner was less lively than usual. Colonel Winington had insisted on inviting two tiresome constituents who did not know how to talk, and Maitland was absent; so was Edith, to whom her hostess had said kindly as they returned from their drive, "I dare say, dear, you would rather lie down and rest, or get into your dressing-gown and read a novel, than put on evening costume and sit down to dinner."

"Yes, I should greatly prefer it. I want to write to Mrs. Miles too. I did not send her a letter yesterday, and I rarely miss doing so on Wednesday. I know she always looks for one."

Edith stayed very contentedly in her room. She pondered long and deeply on all Mrs. Winington had said, and wished, oh, so ardently, that she could please every one by accepting Beaton. Why did she not love him? Perhaps she would grow to like him by and by. If she dared speak to Mr. Maitland about it! But that was not to be dreamed of; she blushed at the idea.

Colonel Winington, who had been always friendly to his wife's quiet little protégée, inquired the reason of her absence, and expressed a hope that all was going on well between her and Beaton.

"Oh, as well as can be expected," returned his wife, laughing. "She is a good little simpleton and not too ready to take up an idea."

"I don't find her dull by any means," said Colonel Winington. "It is quite a relief to meet any one who does

not aim at talking epigrams. Now I must bid you good-night, Lady Mary, if I may not escort you home."

The company had by this time dispersed, and the colonel was going to look in at the "House," which was a sort of club to him.

"No, thank you. Good-night. Are you going to make a speech?"

"No, no. I only express my opinions by my votes."

"The best way, I imagine," said Lady Mary as he left the room. "He is really a good fellow, Jean. You are a lucky woman."

"I dare say I am. Now do stay and let me talk to you. I want to hear what Leslie said yesterday. I hope you scolded him for his folly, his rashness."

"Your brother certainly came to pour his sorrows into my sympathizing bosom," said Lady Mary. "But I confess my warmest sympathy has been excited by his being obliged to marry such a noodle. She will bore him to death. But there, it seems if he does not marry her he may starve to death; it is a desperate alternative."

"My dear, you did not set him against my poor, rich little protégée? He is rather infatuated about you, but that is, you know, of no use."

"I regret to say it *is* of no use, for I find your brother very nice, and most amusing. What an idiot Miss Vivian is to refuse him!"

"Yes. I fancied it would have been a case of 'I came—I saw—I conquered,' with Leslie and Edith Vivian. I can not understand her indifference."

"Well, I think I do," remarked Lady Mary dryly, as she arranged the flowers that adorned her dress.

"You do? Why, what do you mean? What are you hinting at?" cried Mrs. Winington eagerly.

"I think, Jean, you are quite as foolish and a good deal blinder than your brother. Edith Vivian does not care for

Mr. Beaton, because she has already fallen in love with that interesting companion of your childhood."

"You can not believe such an absurdity," cried Mrs. Winington, flushing from throat to brow. "Why, I never thought of such a thing."

"That I quite believe," significantly. "I am a quiet, indolent creature, I let others do the talking, but I *see* a good deal. Your brother has been taken up with *me*, you have been taken up with your rather *farouche* friend, and I have watched you all."

"And what have you seen?" asked Mrs. Winington in a low tone, keeping her eyes carefully cast down.

"I have seen Miss Vivian's face; whenever Mr. Maitland appears it lights up in the most wonderful way. I don't think the little goose is the least conscious of her own feelings, she does not make the slightest attempt to conceal her gladness. I protest she warms up into absolute prettiness as soon as he comes. Now she distrusts Mr. Beaton, she is half afraid of him."

"But how preposterous of her to throw away her pale fancies on Jack Maitland, who scarcely notices her."

"Ah! are you sure he does not? My impression is, that not a look, not a word of hers escapes him."

"Come, come, this is more than observation; it is creative power."

Lady Mary shook her head. "Your friend has very expressive eyes, as I dare say you know, and they have told me more than he imagines. I have seen them dwell on your intended sister-in-law with a look such as no man ever bestowed except on the woman he loved. I am disposed to think he is considerably further gone than she is."

"It is impossible," said Mrs. Winington, in a low deep tone.

"Oh, if you like to think so. Just look back over the last four or five weeks. How much more he has been at your house since Edith Vivian went into training under

your supervision. Remember that dinner at the Orleans Club, our expedition to Kew. Maitland had a good half hour's practical *tete-a-tete* with her at both places; indeed it might have been longer at Richmond, had I not been disinterested enough to send Mr. Beaton to break it up."

Mrs. Winington was silent for a few moments, her rich color fading away, and then said with an effort:

"I do not think Jack would try to cut out Leslie."

"Perhaps. But once a man is in love I should not give much for his good resolutions."

"Really, dear, you don't seem to believe there is such a thing as principle."

"Oh, yes, I do; but, as the railway people say of their iron girders, it is only as strong as its weakest part. Your first love looks solemn and resolute enough, but I suppose he is no stronger than his neighbors. *You* know all about that, no doubt, much better than any one else."

"There is some difference between a boy and a man. At any rate Maitland is far away, or will be far away to-morrow. He has been recalled to Craigrothie by his mother's illness."

"Well, keep him at a distance," said Lady Mary, rising; "it will be better for all parties. I must leave you now, for I promised to call for Mr. Brown at his club, and take him to Lady Carrington's ball—the dear old man has a romantic love for titles."

"I hope affairs are progressing smoothly between you and the great 'Go-bang'?"

"Yes, satisfactorily; so much so, that I almost regret I bestowed that very appropriate nickname. I am afraid it will stick, but perhaps when I have cured him of boasting it may die away. Good-night, Jean; are you going to bed like a sober citizen?"

"I am. I have had a horrid headache all day. This worry about Leslie has upset me."

They exchanged adieus, and the observant Lady Mary went down to her carriage, while Mrs. Winington rang and ordered the lights to be extinguished in the reception-rooms, and then went rapidly to her own.

As soon as she could dispense with her maid she dismissed her, and threw herself into a large chair to think—to review Lady Mary's horrible suggestions.

Had she been so fooled and blinded as to rejoice in the frequent lingering visits which were due to another's attractions? Was the secret of that indifference she so fondly hoped would warm into something of the old ardor to be found in awakening love for that colorless, insignificant chit whom she had loaded with kindness, and really liked? What a nemesis! The more she strove to reject the idea, the more corroborative trifles rose in her memory to indorse Lady Mary's revolting suspicions.

It was bitter, very bitter, to the proud, passionate woman, who best knew what advances she had made to a man who, she began reluctantly to believe, was shielded by that strongest armor, affection for another. Nothing could be more maddening. She had been puzzled by the contradiction between his readiness to spend hours with her, and his increasing coldness. It was all too evident. She did not know till now how he had absorbed her. She meant no harm, she told herself; only once more to catch an echo of the real, ardent love which had cast its spell upon her youth, and which she longed for amid the frothy imitations of the rollicking, frivolous world in which she lived, and moved, and had her being. It was wrong and bad, but she could not restrain a fit of angry, passionate weeping when she thought of the past, and how cruelly the present revenged it. Yet she never for an instant regretted her own heartless conduct. To be poor, and necessarily self-denying, was something not to be thought of for her, although she was prepared to pay dear for certain joys. To see Maitland once more at her feet, to tell him she loved him,

and bid him leave her forever, this would be joy! But, if he ever got this length, would he go?

Ah, well, there was no use thinking about it. What needed her whole force of mind and resolution, was to accomplish her brother's marriage with Edith Vivian.

"She shall be his wife within six weeks," she muttered, rising from the cushions where she had writhed in impotent rage. "She shall be safely out of Maitland's reach long before they meet again."

She bathed her swollen eyes, and leaned from the open window to cool her burning forehead.

At length the rallying power of a fixed resolution calmed her. She turned to her writing-table, drew a chair, and after a minute's thought wrote a carefully worded letter to Jack Maitland—a charming, sympathetic epistle, which Colonel Winington might have read with perfect impunity. Nothing could be more tenderly graceful than her expressions of interest in Mrs. Maitland, her regret for his anxiety, her own eagerness for news of the patient. Then she paused undecided. She was burning to describe, in smoothly flowing periods, the rapid growth of mutual understanding between Miss Vivian and Beaton, the evident adoration of the simple child of nature for the accomplished man of fashion. She thought how she might best charge her communication with the venom which distorted her own mind. But she was purposeful enough to restrain the promptings of unreasoning spite. In such a letter it was out of place to introduce Edith Vivian's name, and such unnecessary information might rouse doubts which she should be the last to suggest, if she really meant to carry out her schemes; and carry them out she would, cost what they might in lying or intrigue.

Mrs. Winington resumed her pen, and battening down the useless vengeance that raged for utterance until a more convenient season, concluded her letter with a kindly mes-

sage from her brother, which would convey the impression that he was at her elbow.

A fully detailed account of all that had happened since he had left her was next addressed to her brother accompanied by much shrewd advice. And then, completely restored to composure, and firmly resolved to play her game with tact and temper, Mrs. Winington extinguished her light, and tried successfully to sleep.

* * * * * * *

There is wonderful power in a clear and thoroughly adopted decision. No energy is wasted in answering paralyzing doubts and queries as to the advisability of some other line of conduct; with a distinctly visible object ahead, it is comparatively easy to shape one's course.

Mrs. Winington was afflicted with few scruples. Her own desires, her own ambitions, were the ends at which she aimed. But being a healthy, fairly well-tempered woman, on very good terms with herself she never quarreled about trifles, and could gracefully give up what she did not care much about. Intensely perceptive of what she really wanted, she always reserved her forces for occasions worthy of them. The succeeding twenty-four hours she devoted to masterly inactivity.

Though kind and gentle with Edith to a degree that woke the keenest stings of self-reproach in that young woman's breast, she was so much engaged that she was reluctantly compelled to leave her a good deal to herself.

Edith longed to solace her depressed spirit by writing a full and true history of the trial through which she had passed to Mrs. Miles, but she had a deep impression that it would be disloyal to Mrs. Winington, as well as to Beaton, if she told the story of her rejection of the latter. She was in truth rather miserable. The fact of her extreme loneliness was borne in upon her with telling force. Her eyes had been opened as they never had been before. New needs had sprung up. She could not go back to the

bare existence she had led before she met Beaton and his sister. Her tastes were quiet enough, but her eyes had been opened, and warmly as she still loved her kind old friend Mrs. Miles, she felt that life would indeed be dreary had she no other companionship.

Mrs. Winington saw with much satisfaction the pale, pensive little face of her young friend grow paler and sadder. She took no notice of the remarkable fact that for three days Maitland had not appeared at luncheon, tea, or dinner. This silence was, in Mrs. Winington's opinion, a bad symptom, and she determined to break it by a bold and masterly stroke.

Beaton had followed his sister's instructions, and duly sent her letters of the most lugubrious description yet naturally written—his dramatic instincts, which made him a priceless jewel in country-houses when theatricals were being organized, suggesting the most characteristic modes of expression. A separate slip generally accompanied this effusion, in which he implored his recall from banishment, and vowed the most abject obedience to his sister's commands. He quite agreed with Lady Mary's view of Jack Maitland's mental condition, and urged Mrs. Winington not to let him be cut out by that clumsy colonist.

"I forgot to tell you that Mr. Maitland has been summoned away, his mother is dangerously ill," said Mrs. Winington to Edith, as they sat together in the drawing-room, the various *habitués* who had dropped in to afternoon tea having departed, and left the patroness and her protégée to a rare *tête-a-tête*.

"I am very sorry," exclaimed Edith, laying down an illustrated paper she had just taken. "He is very fond of his mother."

"I did not think you knew he had a mother," said Mrs. Winington, sharply.

"He has spoken of her to me sometimes," said Edith, innocently, quite unembarrassed.

"She is a charming lady. I was going to say 'old lady,' but in spite of her white hair there is a perennial youth about her that is quite delightful. I like Jack Maitland very much too. He used to be such a good fellow, but I was not quite pleased with him the other day."

"Indeed."

There was not any violent curiosity in the tone.

"No," continued Mrs. Winington, thoughtfully; "I was vexed with him. I thought him too manly for that sort of self-conceit. Perhaps I ought not to tell you, but it may be useful as a warning not to trust appearances." She paused, and Edith looked at her in great surprise. "We were talking of his leaving town," she resumed, "and he said, with his grave smile, 'On one account I shall not be sorry to leave; your little friend is so unsophisticated, that she shows her flattering preference for me in the most unmistakable manner. It would really be touching were it not so funny, and I am not disposed to fall in love in return.'"

There was a moment's silence. The color rose slowly in Edith's cheeks, as if shame and mortification were gradually penetrating her soul. Though she did not dream of doubting Mrs. Winington, she half unconsciously exclaimed—

"He could not have said that."

"Oh, if you imagine I invented the amiable speech—"

"No, no; I do not, but it seems impossible. I found him so kind and—and sensible. I did like him, and like to talk to him, but I am not in love with him. I know I am not. You do not believe I should let myself love a man who does not care about me—do you, Mrs. Winington?"

"I should be sorry to believe you so—so unmaidenly," said Mrs. Winington, with emphasis.

"Indeed—indeed I am not. I am more grieved and disappointed than I can say, to think Mr. Maitland could speak of me in such a way. It is unworthy of him."

"So I think, and so I told him," said Mrs. Winington.

"Are you quite sure he meant *me?*" persisted Edith.

"My dear, do you fancy I would be so idiotic as to make a mistake in such a matter? Believe me, the conceit and vanity of men are unfathomable. I did expect better things from Jack Maitland, but it seems he is no better than the rest. I must say, though, my brother gives himself no superior airs, and pretends to be nothing more than a pleasant, easy-going gentleman. *He* would never talk of a woman in that strain. Though it is rather a breach of confidence, I am almost tempted to show you the two letters he has written me since you banished him."

"Perhaps Mr. Beaton might not like me to see them," said Edith, shrinking back, all quivering, from the cruel blow just dealt her.

"He need never know. Do read them, Edith. I should like you to see the sort of nature you have rejected."

With considerable assistance from Mrs. Winington, for Beaton's writing was exceedingly wild, Edith read the effusions, which were admirably composed, easy, natural, full of veiled sadness, tender, even passionate here and there in his expressions as regarded herself, and touching in their entreaties to his sister not to withdraw her friendship and protection from the little darling who seemed to have no one to care for and watch over her.

Grant a full belief in the truth and sincerity of every one about her, and no girl could have read such letters unmoved. Edith folded them up and returned them to Mrs. Winington with trembling hands and quivering lips.

"He is too good. I do not desire that he should think so much of me. I feel quite angry with myself for not loving him. But I am very young, Mrs. Winington; need I marry any one just yet? I don't feel as if I were fit to be any man's companion."

"My dear Edith, were you any one else I should accuse you of mock modesty."

"No, I am not so modest as you fancy. I know that in many ways I am not unworthy of being loved, but I am very ignorant. I want to learn so much to be at all equal to you, and Lady Mary, and—and Mr. Beaton." Maitland's name was on her lips, but she checked herself in time. "I can not even know how to behave myself, or—or Mr. Maitland would never have spoken so contemptuously, so cruelly of me," and she burst into a passionate flood of tears, so passionate that Mrs. Winington was amazed. She did not imagine there was such fire under her protégée's quiet exterior.

"Dear Edith, dear child," cried Mrs. Winington, delighted at the success of her scheme, yet not unmoved by the sight of her distress. She rose, and drawing the weeping girl to the sofa, put her arms round her affectionately, "You take a mere trifle far too much to heart. The boasting of an inexperienced man, for Jack Maitland really knows nothing of society, is not worth a moment's thought. You don't suppose *I* am influenced by his absurd speech? *I* saw nothing whatever to remark in your manner. You are naturally well-bred. I love your candor, your refreshing simplicity. Pray put these tiresome men out of your head, don't think even of poor Leslie. I want to see you bright again. Go bathe your eyes. Nothing will draw you out of yourself like pictures, and there are one or two wonderful pictures by a Bavarian artist at Colnaglie's. Let us go and look at them. Trust me, dear, I will always be your friend."

Mrs. Winington had quick surface sympathies, which, nevertheless, never interfered with the ultimate carrying out of her personal views, but which for the moment imposed even upon herself, and made her infinitely dangerous.

Edith's heart thrilled with warmest gratitude as she pressed her poor trembling lips to the soft smiling mouth of the beautiful superior being who deigned to love her.

But even Mrs. Winington's boundless condescension could not console her.

Besides her personal mortification, there was the anguish of seeing her ideal shattered, of finding that the image of gold had feet of clay. Moreover, she recognized with a keen sense of degradation that Maitland was right. She loved him, or was on the verge of loving him. She felt in her inmost soul that had he been in Beaton's place her answer would have been different; that her doubts of her own fitness, although she might have entertained them, would not have presented an insurmountable barrier to her assuming the responsibilities of matrimony.

But that was all over now, she must forget her own folly and credulity, and try to be worthy of the friendship so generously bestowed on her. Indeed she was almost disposed to think she ought to marry Beaton out of gratitude to his queenly sister.

While Edith strove to gain composure, and efface the signs of her usual emotion, Mrs. Winington penned a hasty but encouraging letter to Leslie.

"I am really proud of myself," she wrote. "I have made most dexterous use of a hint from Lady Mary, and dealt poor Edith's self-love a fatal blow, from which it must be your business to restore her. She is already disposed to regard you with a sort of grateful kindness which may lead to better things. I suspect Maitland has been—knowingly or not, who can tell—a bit of a traitor. You must, if possible, be married before he comes to the front again. Be ready to start on receipt of a telegram from me. You will find directions at your old quarters. Your letters do you credit; continue them, and never forget all you owe to your very much worried sister, Jean. P.S.—Let me have the guardian's address by return—I mean Dargan's. I may want to see him."

The second post brought another epistle to the exile, who was growing intolerably weary of his enforced solitude.

"I don't like you to hear from any one but myself that I accepted 'Go-bang' last night. Let us call him 'Stanley Brown' in future. I find that the S. on his cards means Stanley. His father, it seems, named him after his landlord. Curious that with his proclivities he should not have used it before *in extenso*. Of course the crucial test of settlements is to come. Heaven grant the alliance may not prove a penal settlement. I think, however, all will go right, and I must say it will be an immense relief to have a house of my own. You would find it the same. Pray make haste and marry your little field-flower, and then we may choose abodes within easy range of each other. I intend to be great friends with Mrs. Leslie Beaton, and I suspect we shall need the support of each other's sympathy. Could you not steal a march on your imperious sister, and come up *incog.* for twenty-four hours? I feel as if a long talk with you would do me good, for somehow I have been so disgracefully weak as to cry over the general 'cussedness' of things.

"Yours as ever, MARY H."

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. WININGTON SCORES.

MRS. MAITLAND was in a very critical condition when her son reached Craigrothie. The doctor in attendance had wrestled with the disease successfully, but feared the weakness which ensued might do death's bidding as effectually as his more active emissary.

It was not until she had been carefully prepared that the sufferer was allowed to see her son. He was profoundly moved at the sight of the pale, delicate face with its silvery hair lying so helplessly on the pillow. His mother could only smile faintly as he bent over her and took her thin, nearly transparent hand in his, with infinite tenderness. Neither spoke.

Maitland could not for a few minutes trust his voice. He knew the loneliness of her life. She was a creature of finer

and more sensitive organization than those among whom she had been fated to pass the larger part of her existence. Needing warmth and sunshine, she had been transplanted to the cold soil, the easterly atmosphere of Major Maitland's dominion. To him and to their children her gentle kindliness, her tender reluctance to wound the humblest creature, was but weakness, almost contemptible weakness, and this idea permeated their judgment of her in all things. No one thought of consulting her, or taking her opinion, or crediting her with the ability she really possessed. Not that they were unkind; they were all well-disposed, practical lads and lasses—fond of their mother in a way, but scarce companions. She could never open her heart to any of them, except to Jack, the strongest and most combative of them all.

Between the mother and her younger son there was profound sympathy, and the dream of Jack's maturer manhood was to make the evening of his mother's days peaceful, bright, and full of affection and warmth.

With his father, Jack had little in common. Major Maitland was narrow and domineering, yet desirous of acting justly toward all men; exceedingly capable within certain limits, and conscientious in the fulfillment of his duties, so far as he understood them. He had been invaluable as an adviser, almost a ruler, to his friend and employer, the late Laird of Craigrothie; but years and gout were beginning to enfeeble him, and make his stern and once equable temper irritable, at times querulous.

From the time her son returned Mrs. Maitland began slowly, very slowly, to gain strength; but for several weeks she required the utmost care. The least occupied of her married daughters had hastened to assist in nursing her, and still stayed on. But it was her son's daily visit and quiet talk that comforted and supported the invalid.

With all his tender care for, and anxiety about, his mother, Maitland's thoughts often strayed to the drama he

knew was being enacted in London. The composed little figure of Edith, the quaint grace of her unstudied movements, the curious, intelligent simplicity that seemed to expose the tinseled unreality with which she was surrounded, whenever she was brought into contact with it, were perpetually in his mind. The honest preference she had unconsciously shown him had completed the charm she exercised. Not that he allowed himself to believe that at present it was more than the friendliness of instinctive trust; but it might be more. It would be a delicious occupation to win the full womanly love of this delicate, unworldly creature, whose gentleness was not weak, whose ignorance was not dull. She would be a kind, tender daughter to his mother; she would be happy in a quiet country home. What a contrast to his first stormy love affair, and to some slighter experiences through which he had since passed! He often conjectured how she was faring among the shrewd worldlings whose intrigues centered round her. Was he, Jack Maitland, playing an honorable, manly part in letting her fall blindfold into the snare? Yet what could he do? Her wealth was a hinderance. What had he to offer that could in any way balance it? He was pondering these things with more than usual bitterness, because his anxiety respecting his mother had been somewhat relieved. She was able to be moved from her bed to the sofa on the eighth day after his return. And Jack had on the following morning mounted his father's favorite hack to visit a distant part of the estate.

It had been a wet night, and the rapidly ripening corn was beaten down in several places. The verdure of the wooded hills was richly, deeply green, the mossy cushions of the crags from which the place took its name, and the abundant leafage which grew around them, were glittering with rain-drops in the bright sunshine which had broken through the dispersing clouds.

He had scarcely cleared the grounds which surrounded

the factor's dwelling when his progress was arrested by a "wee laddie" who was trotting along the road, and who called to him to "come ben, for 'ane' wanted him by Sandy Duncan's at the Beaton Arms."

"Ane! Who?" asked Maitland, reining up.

"I dinna mind the name, but it's a braw gentleman frae the south."

"From the south? Well, I'll come."

A few minutes brought Maitland to the door of the humble hostelry which dominated the chief, indeed the only, street of the village, and to his no small surprise he found the "braw gentleman frae the south" to be Colonel Winington.

"Surprised to see me, hey?" he exclaimed, shaking hands cordially. "London is so deucedly hot and dusty—nothing to do or to see that you haven't seen and done a dozen times, and Mrs. Winington has taken some crotchet into her head about staying to the end of the season. So, as my solicitor says I ought to see what's going on here, I ran down for a day or two."

"I am afraid you will not be very comfortable in this little inn," said Maitland, "and I can't ask you up to our place, for my mother has been dangerously ill, and must be kept very quiet."

"Oh, I shall be all right here. I am not hard to please, and I sha'n't stay long. Come and have some breakfast; there's trout and broiled ham, and cream scones—capital things, cream scones."

Maitland had already breakfasted, but promised to return in half an hour to conduct Colonel Winington over the home farm and through the house, where he declined to take up his abode.

"I am a deuced deal more comfortable here," he said.

The sight of this unexpected visitor set Maitland's memory and imagination actively to work. He dared not question him, lest any report of the interest he betrayed might

reach the keen ears of Mrs. Winington; but he hoped that her husband might fall into a gossiping mood, which was not unusual with the gallant colonel, who, though as sharp as a Yorkshireman where sport and horses were concerned, had a strain of school-boy naïvete running through his character calculated to mislead an ordinary observer, and which often puzzled the wife of his bosom, whom he adored as the finest woman, the cleverest creature extant. Nevertheless, he occasionally saw through her little games with a species of intuition of which he was infinitely proud.

Maitland rather liked Colonel Winington, and by no means envied him the possession of his peerless Jean, though he credited that charming personage with much latent good, which under different circumstances might have been developed.

After a long ramble, and a great deal of business talk, for the colonel was a thorough country-gentleman, and knew a thing or two about farming, he accepted Jack's invitation to luncheon, and they repaired to Westoun, the factor's pleasant home. Here the colonel greatly gratified Major Maitland by expressing his hearty approval of all he had seen and learned in the course of the morning.

"Jack hasn't gone about the world with his eyes shut, I must say," quoth the old factor. "He has a shrewd eye for cattle, and is a decent judge of crops. I think he is anxious to do his duty by the property. Indeed I should have had to give up some time past if I hadn't had him beside me. My eyes are failing me, and I can't get about as I used."

"You couldn't have a better lieutenant," said Colonel Winington pleasantly; and Jack smiled as he looked back, not so very far either, to his father's stern renunciation of him as a ne'er-do-weel and a disgrace to the family.

"Shall we have a cup of coffee and a cigar in the balcony?" he suggested.

"By all means," returned Winington, rising. "You

have a delightful view here, Major Maitland. There's nothing like it up at the house."

"Perhaps not. Give me the 'Scotsman,' Jack. If you'll excuse me, I will stop here and have a nap."

After enjoying the fragrance of their cigars for a few minutes in silence, Colonel Winington observed—

"This is uncommon nice! a deuced deal better than the dusty park, or the shady side of Pall Mall. I have paired off for the next two divisions, so I can breathe fresh air for awhile. I never knew Mrs. Winington stay so late in town, she generally wants to be away before the bloom is off the grape; but she is on another tack now." He nodded knowingly. "Of course you are in the secret! It's her anxiety about her brother that is keeping her. You know what a slippery fellow Beaton is. He has given Mrs. Winington no end of trouble. It's quite natural she should try and secure that heiress she has picked up for him; nice little girl, deuced deal too good for Leslie, *I* think."

Maitland murmured an inarticulate assent.

"Yes; nice soft little dove," resumed Winington, after a few meditative puffs. "It has given Mrs. Winington a lot of trouble. She doesn't think I know, but I do!" he chuckled. "She is far too spunky to confess herself beaten if she can help it, and so I say nothing; but I am pretty sure Beaton has got the sack. He went off at a tangent to Winford, my place. I know he hates it, and hates being alone like poison. I suspect he is doing the broken-hearted, and mademoiselle has headaches, and can't come down to dinner. I suspect my precious brother-in-law is much more cut up about Lady Mary Hay's engagement with old Brown, which has just been announced."

"Has it?" cried Maitland, with vivid interest, his heart beating quickly at the dim delightful possibilities suggested by Winington's revelations.

"Ay! it is a good thing; it will be diamond cut diamond

with them; but that little wood-pigeon, Edith Vivian, that is a different matter. However, I can't interfere. I'm quite sure my wife is biding her time; she'll bring up her man to the scratch again. If she has set her heart on the match, it will go hard but she'll manage it. She holds on like grim death to anything she takes up. You used to be chums in your boy and girl days, she tells me, and she is one that never forgets old times. I can tell you you are a prime favorite still, and we'll be very glad to see you at Winford this season; can promise you some good pheasant-shooting."

Maitland thanked him without accepting.

Soon after the colonel rose, and said he would go back to his inn to write a few letters, and if they could give him a mount, he would ride over to see a neighboring laird whom he had promised to visit when they met in London a few weeks back.

Jack went to sit awhile with his mother, as was his wont in the afternoon, but he scarce knew what he talked about, so filled was his heart, his imagination, with ideas set in motion by Colonel Winington's report of the state of affairs in London. That Beaton had been refused was more than he expected. He did not anticipate such decision on Edith's part. It was by an effort he brought his thoughts under control, and compelled himself to show his usual care in trying to amuse and interest the invalid.

She was surprised and pleased to hear of Colonel Winington's visit, and the friendly spirit he displayed. She was very anxious her favorite son should succeed his father both in his home and occupation. She thought her boy had been hardly dealt with, that he had suffered for the sins of others as well as his own, and she was anxious to see his future assured before she went hence.

The little description of Colonel Winington's appearance and its results excited and fatigued her. Maitland, therefore, seeing she was inclined to sleep, left her earlier than

he usually did, and calling his favorite colly, set forth for a solitary ramble, to commune with his own heart, to search out his spirit, and strive to come to some conclusion respecting his future line of conduct.

As he pressed up the side of Craigrothie hill with firm elastic tread, his spirits rose, his purpose disengaged itself from the mist of doubt and depression which had blurred it, and at length, reaching a grassy nook sheltered by a big gray crag, where many a time in by-gone days he had secluded himself to plan his future, often to think of bonny Jean Beaton, he lay down on the short, thick sweet grass, and the colly sat gravely beside him, with an air of alertness, as if determined to keep watch while his master slept or rested.

But sleep and dreams were far from Maitland's brain. His thoughts began to take order. If Beaton had tried his chance and failed, one barrier to his own progress was removed. Why should he not do his best to win what he so ardently desired? How was it that he had so quickly grown to love this quiet, pale, half-developed girl? To this there was no distinct reply; only his heart answered, "I love her;" only his imagination pictured with a vivid flash the delicate purity of her unpretending aspect, the sweet truthfulness of her steady thoughtful eyes. What a restful home such a woman could make! What endless interest might be found in the growing knowledge of a nature not overready to reveal itself, which, though perfectly candid, had yet a veil of tender reserve. And this defenseless creature was at the mercy of mere intriguers, careful only of their own advantage, and reckless of her happiness! It was the duty of any disinterested friend to rescue her if possible.

Then the recollection of her welcoming smile, her trusting glance, made his pulses throb. "She likes me better than any of the rest; I think she did, but I ought not to be too sure. I thought *Jean* would have stuck to me

through thick and thin, and I was deceiving myself. Still I am half inclined to try my luck. If I fail, *she* would be no worse off than she is now. If she cares for me, dainty little darling! I could make her happy her own way. I wish she hadn't such a lot of money. I shall be thought a fortune-hunter; but I ought not to be a coward about opinion, when I know my own motives, when I know that, were I rich and she hadn't a rap, it would only make me more eager to marry her. Then she is so lonely, so unprotected. Old Mrs. Miles is a capital woman, but no companion for Edith. She can never go back to her old life. How desolate she is! If I do not exaggerate my chances, all may be right. I must make my father come to a definite arrangement; the laborer is worthy of his hire. As for Edith's money, they may tie it up so that I can never handle a penny, if only they let me have herself; but shall I be deterred from securing my *own* happiness certainly, perhaps hers, by a specter of false pride? No; I will be true to myself."

Then the regular sequence of thought became confused with sweet glowing visions of perfect understanding, of rest and security, of gentle caresses. Yes, as soon as his mother was a little stronger he would return to London, and risk an avowal of his hopes and fears. As to the guardians, well, only let him get Edith's consent, and he would manage them. When could he start? Not while Colonel Winington remained. As to Mrs. Maitland, she was distinctly out of danger, and his sister could stay for ten days or so longer. He might run up to town on Saturday, call at the studio on Monday, and coax Edith to take a turn in Kensington Gardens. There he would learn his fate. Indeed it was quite possible that Mrs. Winington, disappointed by the ill-success of her favorite scheme, might have made her house too hot to hold the offending guest. If so, he would find Edith's present address, and follow. Yes, he would tell the dear mother that a matter of vital impor-

tance required his presence in town, and she would let him go. Soon he hoped to return with news that would cheer and comfort her.

So, in a restless but hopeful mood, Jack Maitland rose up, a clear purpose once more steadying his will, and walked home less rapidly than he had set forth.

At the entrance he met his sister with a letter in her hand. "Oh, Jack, I have been looking everywhere for you. I have just heard from Allan" (her husband). "His Uncle Macalister, who is going back to India, has telegraphed to say he is coming to-morrow for a week just to bid us good-bye, and I must really be at home to do the honors, for, you know, Uncle Macalister is a very important personage to us. I will return the moment he is gone, and you will stay with mother; she really would rather have you than any of us."

"But wait a bit, Jessie. I want very much to go up to town."

"I am very sorry, Jack, but I really can not stay. I have ordered George to bring round the wagonette; I can just catch the 6.30 train, and reach home about ten."

Jack was fairly caught. Destiny was too strong for him.

He could not leave his mother, and his sister's absence was prolonged beyond the stipulated week.

Meantime, letters of tenderest, kindest inquiries from Mrs. Winington, both to Maitland and the invalid, came frequently, but with rare mention of Edith, yet Maitland could make out that she was still residing with her fascinating protectress. At last Mrs. Methven returned to take her place beside the delicate mother, and the same day Maitland started for London.

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Mrs. Winington was growing cross and impatient; she was tired of the season, she had two tempting invitations, one to join a party of pleasant people on board a yacht,

and one, still more attractive, to a hospitable country-house within seven or eight miles of Craigrothie. She had renewed her acquaintance with the owner (who had lately succeeded to the family estates), and with his wife, whom she cultivated sedulously; she had almost determined to spend August with them, in the neighborhood of her old home, where she resolved Jack Maitland should be her squire and cicerone, if—if only Edith would make up her mind to marry Leslie and have done with it. Still she kept a fair face, and watched unceasingly for the right moment at which Beaton might reappear.

Edith was very still and humble, looking and feeling miserable; she had learned enough of the new world into which she had been plunged, to know that soon Mrs. Winington would be leaving town, and still nothing was said about Edith's accompanying her.

"I ought to prepare for returning home, dear Mrs. Winington," said Edith timidly one morning at luncheon, when the servants had left the room, a few days after Beaton's disappearance, while the colonel was still absent on his flying visit to Scotland.

"Not yet, Edith. I shall not be leaving town for a few weeks, and I need not say how much I wish you to stay with me; besides—but I don't like to talk of future plans just yet. Tell me, dear, would it annoy you if Leslie were to come here? I want very much to see him. He wants Winington to get him something to do in India, or the west coast of Africa—anywhere out of England," with a sigh; "and you need not mind, for he has resolved to be your friend, if he can be no more."

"Of course I can not expect to banish your brother, and I am very grateful to him for wishing to be my friend," exclaimed Edith, coloring and looking embarrassed. "But the studio will soon be closed, and then I think I ought to go to my own home and poor Mrs. Miles. You have taught me much, and done me a great deal of good."

"Poor dear child," said Mrs. Winington, "how frightfully dull it will be for you!"

"I never used to be dull at Littlemere," returned Edith thoughtfully, "yet somehow I feel as if I should be now."

"You must not stay there long," said Mrs. Winington. "When do you say your studio closes?"

"On the twenty-fifth."

"Why, that is only a fortnight off;" and Mrs. Winington was silent for a few minutes; then she apologized for leaving Edith, as she had several engagements, and soon after she went out.

Edith was accustomed to be left alone of late; she did not in the least resent Mrs. Winington's desertion; she accepted it as unavoidable, but it depressed her with the sense of being of no importance to any one. Moreover, that terrible speech of Maitland's as reported to her had destroyed her self-reliance. If her conduct was such as to create so false an impression, the less she saw of strangers and society the better. A feeling of gratitude toward Beaton began to develop in her heart, though she did not wish to see him, for she had never felt quite at ease with him.

She had been full of these thoughts as she walked back after her morning's work, a couple of days after the above conversation, and rang the door-bell almost mechanically.

"Mrs. Winington is in the morning-room, 'm," said the well-bred butler, waving his hand invitingly in that direction.

Edith, taking it for granted that Mrs. Winington wished to speak to her, walked into the room, but instead of her hostess, she found a gentleman reading the newspaper. At the sound of the opening door he threw it aside, and started to his feet. It was Leslie Beaton.

Edith could scarcely resist the desperate inclination to run away; she was startled, ashamed, disposed to cry. Beaton looked ill, too, and less smilingly debonair than usual. He hastened to put her at her ease.

"I am inclined to apologize for being here, Miss Vivian," he said, pressing her hand for a moment. "I really did not think there was any chance of our meeting this morning," and he smiled pleasantly. "As it *has* so happened, may I speak frankly—may I beg you to let by-gones be by-gones? Allow me the privileges of friendship during the short time I shall be in England. It would make my last days at home so much brighter." He paused suddenly, as if he felt a good deal.

"You are very kind," cried Edith, delighted with the proposition. "I shall be so glad to have you for a friend. It is more than I could expect that you should care for my friendship."

"You know how much I cared—" began Leslie; but checking himself, "We are not to revert to by-gones. Tell me, how are your studies progressing? I expect to see great things. I assure you I often wished you could have seen the woodlands at Winford. It is a sort of sylvan paradise. I was always finding subjects for sketches; indeed I was almost tempted to try my own hand," etc., etc.

And Edith, a good deal to her surprise, found herself launched into an easy conversation on art and scenery and sketching with the man she shrunk from meeting two short hours before.

"Why, Edith," cried Mrs. Winington, coming in quickly, "I had no idea you were here." She spoke in a tone of surprise. "I was obliged to see the head-gardener from Winford about those new orchids, and I had to read him Captain Sewell's letter about them."

A little pleasant general chat ensued, then Beaton said he had promised to call on one or two people, and rose to leave.

"Come back to dinner," said his sister, "and be sure you do nothing rash—nothing at all, indeed, until you consult me."

Beaton laughed, bowed to Edith, and withdrew.

"He is looking wretchedly ill, isn't he?" said Mrs. Winington, turning to Edith. "Poor fellow, I am so glad you have got your meeting over in this accidental way. It would be quite foolish not to be good friends; indeed there is no reason whatever why you should not."

Beaton's return appeared to break the spell of undefined discomfort that had oppressed both Edith and her hostess. He made himself a pleasant, unobtrusive companion. His conversation and manner were more serious, more kindly, and less complimentary than before. He talked of his future life in remote regions, and expressed a manly regret for his wasted youth, his lost opportunities.

Edith began to feel like an indulgent sister to a prodigal but penitent brother. Mrs. Winington took long drives to the more picturesque environs of London, and encouraged Edith to try her "'prentice hand" at sketching from nature. Colonel Winington oscillated between his hunting-lodge, where he kept a stud of horses, and town, and July was drawing to a close.

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Mr. Josiah Dargan was busy as usual over his papers and accounts one sultry morning. His dingy den was dingier and more redolent of dust than ever, the blind he had torn in his effort to save Beaton's eyes from the sun had been carelessly nailed up in a slant, and Dargan himself, who was too dry and bloodless to feel changes of weather, was brown, discolored, and grubby as usual.

He wore a look of satisfaction, however; a fresh victim had just effected a loan through his agency," as he termed it, and he had been calculating his immediate and prospective gains. In this agreeable occupation he was roused by the entrance of the grimy boy, who placed a tiny note before his master, and said interrogatively, "See her?"

Mr. Dargan shoved his glasses a little nearer his eyes, opened the note, and read, "Can you speak to Mrs. Winington for a few minutes?"

"O Lord!" ejaculated Dargan, in a low tone, hastily folding up the note again. "Ay, let her come in, let her come in."

He started up, pushed away his chair, and was half way across the room as his visitor entered.

What an apparition in that dull sordid chamber! A very perfect costume of silvery-gray satin and grenadine and shining gray beads; a bonnet also gray, with downy soft feathers tipped with silver, resting on her fine wavy auburn hair; gloves and shoes and parasol all delicately matching, lent to and borrowed from the wearer additional beauty. Even old Dargan was impressed, and hesitated how to address this dazzling vision.

With a half-surprised, half-contemptuous glance, Mrs. Winington took in the details of the shabby room, and recognized the effect she produced on the owner.

"Do you know who I am?" she asked, showing her white teeth with a frank, amused smile.

"I think I do, I think I do, ma'am—my lady, you are my friend Mr. Beaton's sister; let me give you a chair. I feel almost ashamed to let you sit down on such a tattered seat, but times are hard; as to new furniture, I daren't think of it."

"I came to see *you*, not your furniture, Mr. Dargan," said Mrs. Winington, taking the dilapidated chair. "I want to talk to you about my brother and your ward."

"I am sure, ma'am, I'm all attention," shambling back with his uneven step to his place behind the knee-hole table. "It is a long time since I heard anything of them, and indeed I didn't think your brother was the sort of man to let the grass grow under his feet."

"On the contrary, his precipitancy has nearly ruined all our plans. I say 'our,' Mr. Dargan, for though I have not the pleasure of knowing you, I know all your plans, and the bargain you made with my brother."

"Eh! do you now?" grinning confusedly, and pressing

the nib of a pen on a very black thumb-nail. "Well, I *did* think that little—a—agreement was to be a secret betwixt Mr. Beaton and myself, of course."

"Of course," interrupted Mrs. Winington. "It was quite right and natural that he should confide the whole affair to *me*, especially as neither of you could have carried out your schemes without my help. It is equally natural that you should look after your own interests, though strait-laced people *might* say the means you took to secure them were not exactly creditable."

"Well, you see, what people say doesn't reach my ears," returned Dargan, with a deprecatory writhe, rubbing his hands together. "And how is Mr. Beaton getting on, may I be so bold as to ask?"

"He is not getting on at all," cried Mrs. Winington, with a burst. "He is such an impatient creature, and your ward is an obstinate simpleton. He proposed too soon, and she refused him."

"Good Lord! think of that now. Such a fine, elegant gentleman. I didn't think any young lady would say him nay," and Dargan began nervously to gather up the papers which lay about, and sort them in an unconscious way. "And do you mean to say it's a drawn game?"

"I do not intend it shall be," said Mrs. Winington, closing her mouth firmly.

"Then what do you mean to do, my lady—I mean, ma'am?" asked Dargan, nibbling the top of his pen, and gazing at her with some awe and a good deal of admiration.

"Listen; I have not much time to spend here, and if you intend to get your money you must help me. I suspect that Miss Vivian has rather taken a fancy to a very unsuitable person, whom she unfortunately met at my house—a stern, puritanical countryman of mine, who would not lose an atom of his just rights to save your life. *He* would be more likely to expose what he considered a fraud, than

lend himself to any little arrangement that might facilitate matters. In short, he must *not* interfere with my brother."

"No, certainly not; that's right."

Mrs. Winington's eyes rested with unspeakable disdain on the withered, grinning, ignoble face opposite to her.

"I'm sure you have only to command me."

"I have managed to bring Miss Vivian and Mr. Beaton together again, and she is playing at friendship with him. Let them pursue that game for awhile, then you must strike a blow and cut off her retreat. Your sister is her companion?"

"She is."

"And I presume you have a good deal of influence on Mrs. ——"

"Miles," put in Dargan. "Yes," rubbing his hands softly, "I *rather* think I have."

"Then you must make her give up her engagement with Miss Vivian. Invent something imperative; send her away somewhere, a long way off; let that damp cottage in Hampshire, or sell it; cut off her supports, leave her no 'stand by' but Mr. Beaton. She is peculiarly desolate; this ought to make her thank her good genius that she has found such a protector as my brother."

"My sister will no doubt do as I bid her," said Dargan, laying down his pen, and beginning to stroke down his leathery puckered cheeks with his finger and thumb. "But it seems a little strange to me that you should be so desperate anxious to get my ward for your brother. Grand people like you might have a choice of heiresses, I should think."

"Heiresses fenced round with bristling hedges of uncles well up in the private history of every man in society, and cousins anxious to keep the money in the family, if you like, but not heiresses perfectly free and unencumbered. Do not waste my time and your own in conjecture. Will you follow my suggestion, or shall we break off negotia-

tions, and send your ward back to the wilds from which you dragged her, poor child, for your own ends?"

"I don't pretend to be an angel, Mrs. Winington, no more than Mr. Beaton does, but I thought, and I still think, I was doing the best I could for Miss Vivian by pushing her marriage. I'm of your opinion that this shilly-shallying ought to be put a stop to; but you are as quick as a flash of lightning, and down on a man before he knows where he is. I think your notion is very good, very good, and you'll see I'll not be long about acting on it. I'll start Mrs. Miles off and give her permanent employment; but I hope, when the knot is tied hard and fast Mr. Beaton would not object to a little annuity in consideration of the help she is giving him."

"She is helping you, too, Mr. Dargan," said Mrs. Winington, shrewdly, "and I hope *you* will not prove ungrateful." She rose as she spoke. "We understand each other then," she continued; "our interests are alike. I suppose I may depend on you?"

"I'll be as true as the needle to the pole," cried Dargan, enthusiastically.

Mrs. Winington laughed as she gathered up her delicate skirt lest it should touch the dirty carpet, and with a slight, haughty bend of the head left him.

"Well, she is a clipper, I never saw her match; and isn't she regular fire and tow! I wonder now what's the real reason she's so keen for this wedding? there's something more than anxiety about her brother under it all. I'll say nothing to Tilly about this; time enough, time enough. As to Sally, she daren't refuse me anything, and Tilly has no call to interfere with her, duty and family affection must be attended to. Where will I send her? Liverpool; ay, Liverpool would do well, very well."

Meantime Mrs. Winington, who had driven to C. Street in a cab, and kept it waiting, was proceeding homeward *via* the Strand, when by one of those curious currents in

the stream of life which are no doubt governed by laws as yet undiscovered, despite their apparently accidental nature, she was drifted against the man who occupied her thoughts.

A little past Temple Bar there was a block, and her cab was obliged to stand still for a minute or two beside the footway. As she looked listlessly at the passers-by, she suddenly recognized Jack Maitland coming from the direction in which she was going. With a mixture of surprise, vexation, pleasure, but the last strongest, she waved her hand and caught his eye. He came readily enough, and the next instant she was exclaiming, with smiling lips and eyes—

"Back again in London, Mr. Maitland! Then I hope your dear mother is going on favorably."

CHAPTER VIII.

ACCEPTED.

"It was always with a sensation of pleasurable excitement that Mrs. Winington met Maitland, but on the present occasion it was by no means unmixed. His coming was most inopportune, his appearance might introduce a discordant element into the scheme she was so diligently harmonizing. But even while she smiled on him the kindest of welcomes, she said in her heart, "He shall not defeat me, nor even delay me."

"Shall you be long in town," she asked, after Maitland had replied to her inquiries.

"Only a day or two. I have no railway business to detain me now."

"We are, unfortunately, going out to dinner to-day, but can you look in and have a cup of tea a little before five?"

"Certainly. I shall be most happy," returned Maitland; his eyes lighting up with the joyous, tender expression she knew so well.

"Do not be late." She kissed her hand to him as he stepped back and signed to the driver that he might go on.

"He is not handsome," thought Mrs. Winington, "but how much better-looking than most handsome men. Oh, no one ever loved me as Jack did, and I treated him abominably. I think he likes me a little still." Then the horrible suspicion flashed across her brain, Could the light that came to his eyes have been evoked by the prospect of meeting Edith Vivian? No, impossible! how could that insignificant child attract him from her rich beauty and practiced charm—a charm, too, which had once completely captivated him? The perfume of those delightful, foolish days *must* hang round her still. Oh, to hear him say in the deep full tones that used to stir her blood, if not her heart, "No one can ever be to me what you were!" No, it was not likely that a poor little simpleton could be her rival. Lady Mary was dreaming; yet, "He shall not see her," was her fixed determination, as she alighted within a short distance of her own door, and dismissed the conveyance.

"Has Mr. Beaton been here this morning?" asked Mrs. Winington, as she entered her own mansion.

"No, 'm," said the butler.

"Then send to the club, and say I want to speak to him at once; send one of the grooms on horseback. If Mr. Beaton is not at his club, let the man go to his lodgings."

"Very well, 'm."

Mrs. Winington went to her room.

At luncheon the master of the house made his appearance, which was not an event of every-day occurrence, and when Mrs. Winington and her brother came in, they found him chatting cheerfully with Edith in the bay-window looking on the gardens.

"By George!" cried Colonel Winington, "Miss Vivian has been making great progress, Jean. I have persuaded her to let me see some of her work. Look here," holding

out a drawing of a lattice window, one half open, with ivy and clematis clustering round the side, a vase standing on the window-sill as if in readiness for the flowers that were to fill it. "It's deucedly natural. There's a window in the head-keeper's lodge at Winford just like this. You must come down and see it."

"Yes, that is a very nice little bit," said Mrs. Winington, "and it is from a real window. Mr. Herman has a charming old house; he built his studio beside it."

"It's uncommon pretty," continued Winington. "But come, let us sit down. I am as hungry as if I had breakfasted last month. Beaton, cut that chicken-pie. What's the matter with you? I never knew you so silent since I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance. Have you been snubbing him, Miss Vivian?"

Edith blushed quickly, vividly. Mrs. Winington frowned, and could hardly refrain from uttering the "How asinine!" which sprung to her lips.

"They say Parliament is to be dissolved on the fifth of August," she said to her husband, intending to draw him effectually from the subject.

"*They* say! Who says? Some blundering idiot. There's no such luck. But I am not going to stay on roasting here. We'll go down to Winford; sha'n't we, Miss Vivian? and you shall make pictures by the yard. Try a little hock; do, it's iced, and very good."

"No, thank you;" then, addressing Mrs. Winington, "I have written to Mrs. Miles and to Mr. Tilly, telling them that the studio would be closed next week, and that *you* can not stay much longer in London, therefore I had better return to Littlemere." She spoke with some hesitation, and looked appealingly to Mrs. Winington.

"Well, dear, I wish you had spoken to me before you wrote. I shall not leave town till the first of August, and though I can not exactly fix my plans, there is time

enough; you need not be in such a hurry to run away from us."

"No, let us all go down to Winford together. You don't want to go off on any distant cruise, do you, Jean?" cried Colonel Winington.

"I shall not commit myself," she returned, laughing.

Beaton preserved an expressive silence, his eyes fixed on his plate.

"I do not wish to go, indeed I do not," said Edith earnestly. "You are all so good to me, but I fear to be in your way, and I do not want to desert my own home."

"And we are of course tired of so tiresome and naughty a little girl," said Mrs. Winington, with a pleasant smile. "However, things will arrange themselves. I was going to propose, as it is such a splendid day, to drive over to Clapham Common in the pony-carriage. There are some rather picturesque groups of trees there—one specially on an island in the large mere or pool. It might be good practice to try and sketch them; trees are so difficult. I went there once with your sister, Frank, when she was art crazy."

"Ah, I remember," said Colonel Winington, nodding.

"Unfortunately," his wife went on, "I have had a manifesto from Madame Laure, who is coming to try on my autumn costumes, and plan an evening dress or two; and if I lose this chance I may not catch her again, for Laure is a personage, I assure you."

"I am very sorry," cried Edith, impulsively; "it is so difficult to find anything to sketch near London."

"Why lose this bright idea?" said Beaton, looking up. "Can you trust Miss Vivian and the ponies to *me?* I will drive carefully, and cut pencils *et cetæra* with diligence. What do you say?"

"An excellent suggestion," exclaimed Mrs. Winington. "Will you accept it, Edith?"

"Yes; thank you very much. I should be so glad to do a little more sketching."

"You are right, Edith. Then I will order the phaeton to come round at three, and you'll have a nice long afternoon. Ring the bell, Leslie."

"Ha, Beaton, you haven't served *your* apprenticeship in drawing-room life for nothing," said Colonel Winington significantly.

His wife looked at him with a warning frown, but his insinuation fell harmlessly on Edith's ear; she was feeding Mrs. Winington's favorite skye with bits of sweet biscuit.

Colonel Winington rose soon after, and left the room, saying he had promised to meet a fellow at Tattersall's.

Mrs. Winington soon followed his example, and Edith went to put her drawing materials together.

Maitland thought time had never gone so lingeringly as between his meeting with Mrs. Winington and five o'clock, when he was due at Fairfield Terrace. He felt quite sure of meeting Miss Vivian. He knew from a letter of the colonel's, received only a couple of days before, that she was still Mrs. Winington's guest, and likely to remain. Moreover, she never went out without her hostess.

Would she welcome him with the sweet, frank, unconscious gladness he had often read in her eyes when they had met unexpectedly, or would she have changed during his absence? If not, no weak scruples should hold him back from trying to win her. If she had absolutely refused Beaton, as Colonel Winington seemed certain she had, Mrs. Winington had no right to be opposed to *him*, and yet he felt with instinctive conviction that she would oppose him bitterly.

"I must steer with caution," he thought as he rang, and was admitted into the cool, dusky, perfumed hall.

"This way, sir," said the butler, ushering him upstairs to the smaller of the two drawing-rooms, where Mrs. Winington sat in softened light, amid a profusion of delicious

flowers, fresh from a second toilet, after showing herself in her carriage, shopping, and leaving cards. She had hurried home and dressed just in time to be languidly at ease when Maitland was announced.

"Bring the tea; and, Miller, I am not at home." The butler bowed obedience and retired.

"I am quite glad to hear all about your mother and dear Craigrothie from yourself," said Mrs. Winington, when they had exchanged greetings. "Mrs. Maitland was always so good to me when I was 'a mitherless bairn' at home. I hope she is gathering strength."

"Very slowly. Yet she does improve. I doubt, however, that she will be able to bear an autumn and winter at Westoun, though it is the most sheltered spot on the estate. I shall take her away south somewhere."

"You were always very fond of your mother, Jack," said Mrs. Winington, naturally. "But oh, there is no use in looking back. Can any after-glow the world gives equal the fresh delights of early days? I am half ashamed of the aching at my heart when I think of them."

"I don't fancy, considering your present surroundings, you have very much cause to regret them," said Maitland, smiling.

"You think so?" looking down. "I have most to regret my own folly and weakness," sighing slightly. "But tell me more about your mother," she resumed, as the servant placed tea and wafer-like bread and butter on the table noiselessly, and then vanished. "It is years since we met. I suppose her tranquil life has left few traces on her sweet face. She always seemed a kind of saint to me."

"She is a good deal changed, for though her existence has been still enough, Heaven knows, she has had a great deal of anxiety, and little exterior support."

"It must be a great comfort to her having you at home," returned Mrs. Winington, and she continued to speak of their mutuaal experiences in the past, approaching

dexterously the scene of their stormy parting, with the intention both of eliciting some expression of his feelings from Maitland, and of giving her own explanation of the fact that she threw him over for a wealthy suitor.

But her skill was unavailing, unerring instinct told her they were not in sympathy, that she neither touched nor stirred him. An irritating sense of pain and defeat began to dull the keenness of her native tact; she could scarce keep her brow smooth, and as she caught Maitland's eyes wandering occasionally with an expectant look to the door by which he supposed every moment Edith would appear, she found it impossible to maintain her tone of dreamy, tender reminiscence. Was he looking for Edith, thinking of that pale-faced chit while she was metaphorically at his feet?—had she lost all chance of reawakening the passion she had herself extinguished?

"Are you not a little *distrait*, Mr. Maitland?" she asked, with a well-got-up air of playfulness. "Whom are you looking for?—Leslie, or Miss Vivian?"

"I rather expected to find Miss Vivian with you," said Maitland, with such unhesitating frankness that Mrs. Winington was a little reassured. "Leslie is out of town, I heard."

"Yes, he *was* out of town," returned Mrs. Winington slowly, for she was making up her mind to a big bold falsehood. "But he came back nearly a fortnight ago, and I am sure you will be glad to hear that my hopes have been fulfilled. Miss Vivian has made up her mind" ("which she *shall*," said the fair intriguer to her heart, in self-extenuation) "to marry Leslie. He has driven her over to Clapham to-day, as she wanted to sketch some trees there. I really begin to think Leslie will be very fond of her. I am sure he *ought*, for she is devoted to him."

Silence. It was a most unexpected blow, and for a moment Maitland was too stunned to think clearly. He rallied

himself by an effort. It would not do to make an enemy for Edith of this clever, unscrupulous woman.

"I congratulate you," he said, looking down, while he tapped the carpet softly with his stick. "I hope Beaton will make a kind, steady husband. Miss Vivian seems to be something of a home bird."

"Like other women, she will probably become what her circumstances make her," said Mrs. Winington, shortly. "As the engagement is only just made, I beg you will not speak of it at present to any one."

"Certainly not, if you desire it. I did not fancy affairs would go quite so quickly from what I saw before I left town."

"Oh, they went much quicker after you left. It will be announced next week, and then we shall hurry on the marriage as fast as possible; in fact I shall not leave town till it is an accomplished fact. Then, after such prolonged self-abnegation, I am going to stay with the Johnstones at Strathairlie to refresh myself with a glimpse of the dear old country."

"Indeed! It is a long time since you visited the banks and braes of Craigrothie," returned Maitland, in a somewhat forced voice.

"Yes; quite ages. Shall you be at home in September?"

"I suppose so."

"Then you must be my guide, philosopher. and friend in the scenes of our youth," said Mrs. Winington, stealing a watchful glance at his somber countenance.

"I am at your service, of course."

Mrs. Winington felt the formality of his tone and sighed.

"If you are disengaged to-morrow, come to dinner and meet the affianced ones," pursued Mrs. Winington, coldly; while she told herself, "He will not come."

"I shall be most happy, if I am in London; but should

I settle the matter about which I came up, I am bound to return by the night mail." He rose as he spoke.

"We will hope to see you, however," said Mrs. Winington, smiling sweetly, without making any attempt to delay him.

"For the present, good-bye then. Should I not see you before I go, pray congratulate Beaton for me at the right time."

"He will tell you himself, I have no doubt. Remember, 7:45 to-morrow. Good-bye."

Mrs. Winington stood looking after him for a minute, her brows knitted, the finger-tips of one hand resting on a small table beside her, the other grasping a locket at her throat.

"He came here to seek her," she murmured; "herself, *or* her money. Mary is right; I believe he loves her. I suspect I have dealt him a cruel blow. How gallantly he took it! He must *never* know I lied to him. Now this marriage *must* take place; and soon, cost what it may to every one concerned. How his eyes sought that door! Had *she* come in, they would have told everything in spite of his strength and self-control. Oh, how different he is from the willow wands of men that surround me!"

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Edith returned from her sketching excursion looking brighter and better than Mrs. Winington had seen her since the day on which she had wounded her with the speech she had put into Maitland's mouth.

"If she likes Leslie and marries him willingly, I will forgive her," thought Mrs. Winington, as she looked at her sweet eyes and soft color. "She really can look almost pretty."

"Had you a pleasant afternoon, and did Leslie cut your pencils judiciously?" she asked kindly, as they went upstairs; Edith to take off her hat, and her hostess to dress for a dinner-party.

"It was very pleasant indeed. Mr. Beaton was, as he always is, so good. How much he knows, Mrs. Winington! He gave me quite an interesting account of Clapham, and Streatham, and Dr. Johnson."

"Did he?" with a little surprise. "Oh, he is not dull."

It was not till the next day when they were breakfasting, however, that Mrs. Winington thought fit to tell Edith of Maitland's visit. She had pondered profoundly on the best method of dealing with this fact, though it was with a natural air of sudden recollection she exclaimed—

"Oh, by the bye, I forgot to tell you I had a visit from Jack Maitland yesterday."

Edith colored a little, but answered calmly, "Indeed! I suppose his mother is much better?"

"Yes; nearly quite well. I don't know how long he is going to stay. I asked him to dinner to-day; both Colonel Winington and Leslie like him."

"Will he come?"

"He will if he does not go north to-night. Why, you don't like him; eh, Edith?"

"I am not so foolish as to dislike him, though I am sorry he is not as wise as I thought he was," and she smiled.

"That he certainly is not. He asked for you, but with a sort of mocking, pitying smile that vexed me. Are you sure, dear child, you never showed him any particular preference?"

"Not that I am aware of; but you know how ignorant and untrained I am, dear Mrs. Winington. And when I am left to myself again I shall probably forget all you have taught me."

"You must not be left alone," said Mrs. Winington, thoughtfully.

And Edith went away to read in her own room, as was her habit; but it was some time before she could fix her mind on her book. The sense of unmerited humiliation,

of pain and anger against Maitland which she had successfully suppressed, was again aroused, and made her heart beat with indignation and regret.

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Mrs. Winington was not surprised to receive a line of apology from Maitland; he found it necessary to leave for Edinburgh by the night train. "I wonder what his business in London really was?" she thought, as she threw his note into the waste-paper basket; "at any rate he is safe out of the way. When he meets Edith again she shall be Mrs. Leslie Beaton."

Another week had nearly passed by, and Edith had had no answer from Mrs. Miles. She saw less than ever of her brilliant hostess, who was much engaged assisting Lady Mary to choose her trousseau. Beaton, however, was constantly with her, always quickly attentive, and interested in all that interested her. She was growing quite at ease with him, and sincerely grateful for his ready friendly sympathy.

Mr. Tilly had paid her a visit, and stayed to luncheon, where he seemed anything but comfortable. He said that he and his excellent friend Dargan were going to arrange about her future residence, and introducing some little variety into her life, and was generally amiable and vague.

One Saturday morning, however, brought poor Edith two terrible letters. One from Mr. Dargan, announcing that as both Mr. Tilly and himself were of opinion that their ward should no longer be buried alive in a country village, they had accepted a very good offer for the cottage, and let it on lease. His sister, Mrs. Miles, would, he said, speak for herself. He only deeply regretted the circumstances which obliged her to leave her dear charge.

The other was from poor Mrs. Miles, and was a very incoherent production; it was even illegible here and there from big tears which had evidently fallen on the paper. She explained in a confused fashion that an aunt who had

shown her kindness in former days was dying of a lingering illness, and was quite alone; that she felt it her duty to go and nurse this relative to the last; that it broke her heart to leave her dear Edith, but it could not be avoided; that it would be almost the sorest day she ever had when she left the cottage, and that would be on Tuesday next. Finally, she prayed God to bless her dear child, and restore them to each other.

Besides the letter a scrap of paper had been thrust into the envelope, on which were scrawled in tremulous characters these words: "I can't help myself, dear, I can't indeed. I'll tell you all yet; wait a bit, and *burn this.*"

Edith read both letters twice before she took in their meaning; then the full sense of her desolation rushed upon her. Without a home, a tie, a claim on any one, what was she to do? what was to become of her? Only at breakfast a couple of hours ago, Mrs. Winington had been talking of a series of visits she had promised to pay to various country houses. Where was she to turn? The consciousness that she had money enough for all her needs was a sort of abstract idea that brought her no comfort.

There was a tinge of mystery, too, in this sudden wrenching asunder of the faithful Mrs. Miles and herself that completed her distress. Dargan was at the bottom of it. She had an innate distrust of Dargan; and Mr. Tilly, though so much nicer, was a mere puppet in his hands. She had no real friend on earth but Mrs. Winington, and perhaps Mr. Beaton, though she had no right to trouble either. She gathered up these dreadful letters, and ran to Mrs. Winington's private sitting-room, eager to confide her griefs to her only friend and receive counsel, but the room was empty.

Edith sat down, hoping Mrs. Winington might come in before going out, as she often did, in the forenoon. Once more she read Mr. Dargan's letter, thinking all the time she heard his thin, harsh voice uttering the smooth sen-

tences, and almost seeing his sycophantic grin. Her pulse beat quick, with an indignant sense of helplessness. Why did they tear Mrs. Miles from her, and why, oh, why did not Mrs. Winington come?

As she thought the handle of the door turned. At the sound Edith started up, and went forward so eagerly that she nearly rushed into Beaton's arms as he came in. She was too full of her troubles to be in any way confused.

"Oh, where, where is Mrs. Winington?" she exclaimed, with a genuine ring of distress in her voice.

"She has just gone out," he returned, looking earnestly at her.

"How unfortunate! I wanted her *so* much," and a great sob would rise in her throat, in spite of her brave effort to be calm.

"What has happened?" asked Beaton, with grave sympathy. "Can I be of any use?"

Edith looked at him for a moment of doubt, and then broke out, "No, no, no one can be of any use to me! Mr. Dargan can do what he likes!"

"Old rascal! What has he been about?" asked Beaton, with an accent of real wrath that fitted Edith's mood exactly. "I see," he continued, "you have letters. Are they the trouble? Am I presuming too much if I ask to know what distresses you? My sister will not return for a couple of hours. It might be a relief to tell me, even *me*," with a grave smile.

"I should be very glad, as you are so good to care. Read these, and you will not wonder at my feeling desolate." She handed him the letters, and threw herself on the sofa with self-abandonment very new to her.

Beaton stood by the window and read both epistles in silence. Edith thought the time dreadfully long before he came across to where she sat, and returned them to her.

"Very hard lines for you," he said, "but I do not see

how it is to be helped." (Edith had loyally burned poor Mrs. Miles's private scrap.)

"Don't you see it takes away from me any shadow of home? When Mrs. Winington goes I shall be quite, *quite* alone!" cried Edith.

"And Jean has so many engagements," said Beaton, as if to himself, beginning to pace to and fro with a troubled air. "That will not last long, however. *You* can make a home where you choose."

"I am afraid I can not! Where can I go? To some strange old lady who will not like me? for I do not get on with people. You must see that. I am misunderstood;" and she thought of Maitland.

"But when they know you they love you," cried Beaton, and continued his walk in silence, till Edith, placing her letters in her pocket, rose, saying, "Nothing can be done till I see Mrs. Winington."

"Stay, stay for a few minutes, Miss Vivian, I have a solution to propose," said Beaton, with agitation; "pray hear it patiently." He had thoroughly dramatic instincts, and threw himself into his part, be the part what it might.

Edith sat down again. He had so effectively played the calm friend, that Edith hardly anticipated what was coming.

"I ought not perhaps to revert to my own wishes," he went on hurriedly—"wishes I have tried to resign, but can not. Why, Edith, will you not accept a home with me? No, do not speak yet, hear me out." He sat down on the sofa beside her. "I can see plainly enough that you have no love for me. I feel too much for *you* not to perceive your indifference, but as a friend my society gives you some little pleasure. Do I flatter myself too much?"

"No, indeed!" cried Edith, eager to make some amends for her guilty coldness; "you are always nice and pleasant."

Beaton smiled. "Then do you think it impossible for me to make you happy? Dear Edith (I must call you Edith), you are so deliciously pure and simple, you don't

know what love is. I will never believe you cared a straw for *any* man." Edith winced. "Let me try and teach you; I know your heart, your mind; I know the sort of life that would suit you; and though I may not be worthy of you, I am not a bad fellow. I have a good temper, and more heart than I thought I had, till *you* drew it forth. I am a poor man, I can not tempt you with wealth, but we shall have enough for a quiet life. We can wander about the Continent, and revel in music and pictures, and make a home wherever we go. You are surely not so hard as to be unmoved by such true affection, such warm esteem as mine? If you accept me you can do what you will, independent of guardians or any other nuisance of that kind, and you will make one man very happy."

His quiet earnestness touched Edith; she hesitated and grew very grave, as she thought it was quite possible she could be tranquil and happy with such a devoted friend. No one else had ever loved her except poor Mrs. Miles, and gratitude alone ought to make her appreciate a "free-will" offering like Beaton's love. *He* showed no conceited assurance that she was ready to love him on the smallest provocation. Why should she not accept him, and secure his kindly tender protection? Why should she remain friendless any longer?

"Will you at least consider my proposal?" persisted Beaton humbly, after a long pause.

"You are too good to me," said Edith softly. "I feel ashamed of not—of not being in love with you; but I don't think I am, though I like you very much and am very, very grateful to you. I am greatly surprised that you care about me; I hardly deserve it. You could not like to have a wife who was not in love with you?"

"I should like you to be my wife on any terms," eagerly.

"Afterward you might be sorry; I am so different from—"

"That is your greatest charm," he interrupted. "You

are so fresh, so unlike the women I have been accustomed to. Listen to me. I have had the offer of an employment in Africa. If you accept me I will give it up; it is not a place I would take *you* to. If you refuse I will start next week, and never—I swear it—never return. My future is in your hands, do with it what you will."

Edith was greatly shaken. Firmly believing all he said, it seemed all but imperative on her to accept him. Who would ever care so much for her again? A feeling that if she rejected him she would never find any one to love her as he did, impelled her to say tremulously—

"If indeed you think me so necessary to you, if you are satisfied with the sort of feeling I have for you, I think—I think I would try to be very good and careful."

"If!" cried Beaton, interrupting her, and catching her hand in both his own. "I make no conditions. I only ask the right of a husband to be with you always, to help you, to teach you to love me. Do you know—can you see the delight even this faint consent gives me? Make it more—more distinct; give me your promise to be my wife as soon as matters can be arranged."

"Yes," said Edith slowly, almost solemnly, "I will, and I shall love you when we are married, I am sure I shall." She spoke calmly, without any of the blushing hesitation, the shy consciousness, natural at such a crisis.

Beaton wisely took his tone from her. He kissed the hand he held tenderly, gravely; he murmured—

"How can I thank you enough! Even for the sake of this delightful moment I would not have tried to win your consent, if I did not firmly believe I could insure your happiness, dearest."

He looked so bright, so joyous, that Edith felt pleased with herself for giving pleasure. Yes, it was well to end her uncertainties, and secure a tranquil future by accepting so devoted a lover; but she wanted to go away, to think, to relieve her heart by a good cry.

"Must you leave me?" said Beaton, as she made a move as if to go; then he exclaimed, "But I must remember there is some difference in our feelings, I must not be too exacting. I shall see you this evening. Now I have your permission to go and speak to old Dargan; he is sure to be in his den early and late. You will tell Jean, if I do not meet her; she will be delighted, she is really fond of you. Good-bye, my sweet."

He opened the door for her, he kissed her hand in Grandisonian style, and looked unutterable things after her as she ran swiftly upstairs—in case she turned back. Then he went into Mrs. Winington's sitting-room again, looked at himself in the glass, nodded approvingly at his own image, rearranged his "button-hole," and descended to the dining-room, where he told the footman to bring him a brandy and soda.

Before he had finished this refreshment his sister came in.

"Well, Jean," he cried triumphantly, "I'm all right *this* time; she is fully and completely committed."

"I *am* glad!" exclaimed Mrs. Winington. "I did not think you would strike home so decisively at the first blow. I *am* glad!"

"She is a nice little thing, 'pon my soul she is! I was quite pleased with her. But, mind, she is not one bit in love with me, not an atom, and it's really better. I hope she won't grow too desperately fond by and by."

"Nonsense! Now the sooner we make it universally known that you *are* engaged the better; let us 'haste to the wedding.' We can manage to have the knot tied within a month from this. Ah, Leslie, all's well that ends well. I must go to Edith now. Where is she?"

"Weeping over the tremendous destiny, I dare say, in her own room. She ought to have stayed and let me kiss away her tears."

CHAPTER IX.

AN INTRUDER.

"You will, I fear, think me heartless for not writing before. It is not that I feel less anxious about dear Mrs. Maitland, but I have been breathlessly busy, as both Leslie and Edith Vivian are anxious to have the wedding on the 28th if possible. For my own part I shall not be sorry to see the last of the turtle-doves, who are billing and cooing about me all day long. You know poor Edith's outspoken simplicity, and can imagine how demonstrative she is under present circumstances. Leslie is, I think, growing quite fond of her, and will, I am sure, make a very tolerable husband. He talks of asking you to be his best man. I hope you will come, as you have been in the business from the first. The worst of it all is, I can hardly get away till the 30th, and town is something *too* doleful. I long for a breath of Craigrothie air! It is nearly five years since I saw the old place. It then filled me with unspeakable melancholy. I could enjoy it now, because you are restored to your proper place. Pray write soon, and tell me what Mrs. Maitland's plans are for the winter.

"Always yours,

"JEAN WININGTON."

Jack Maitland read this epistle over a second time, as he walked through a bit of woodland to visit a farm, the tenant of which had been clamoring for repairs. Recognizing the handwriting when the contents of the post-bags were distributed at breakfast, he deferred reading it, feeling certain it would contain something to wound and fret. The perusal justified his anticipations. The letter was cunningly contrived to stab him, and accomplished its end; but he did not dream it was designed. He never imagined that Mrs. Winington had any clew to his feelings. Her letter seemed to him the natural sequence of her announcement that her brother and Miss Vivian were engaged. Yet the picture

her words called up made him set his teeth as if in pain, and he wished she had been less suggestive. Not that he believed Edith was too demonstrative; her quiet, somewhat sedate, nature was far removed from the effervescent condition irreverently called "gush." That she would be frankly, deliciously tender he had no doubt.

Well, he was infernally unlucky. He might have had as good a chance as Beaton, had he not been called away. Now, it would be long before he could banish the cruel heart-ache that blackened all he looked upon. As Beaton's wife he never wished to see Edith's face again; *he* would not make her happy, and to see her changed or sad would be more than he could bear. As to Mrs. Winington, she had been his evil genius from first to last, and for the moment the thought of her was hateful to him. He tore her letter into tiny morsels, flung it into the brawling burn by which the pathway led, and made a strong effort to turn his mind fully to the business he had in hand, with so much of success that the farmer, after a prolonged interview, told his wife that young Maitland was "sair dour the day."

Meanwhile Mrs. Winington contrived to keep Edith in a constant whirl. She was positively alarmed at the amount of clothes and toilet accessories which her energetic friend declared to be absolutely necessary.

Colonel Winington enforced his congratulations with the gift of a handsome bracelet, and made much of her in every way. Lady Mary in the midst of her own preparations for her immediate marriage, found time to indite a sugary epistle, expressing her hope that they would become fast friends when they were settled in town, etc., etc.

Beaton was constantly with her, and for the first fortnight most judicious. He kept up the tone of friendly sympathy, occasionally dashed with tenderness. He amused her by planning routes, describing the beauties and wonders he was to show her, and he kept her mind full of himself and his projects. Maitland was never mentioned;

indeed Edith thought she had forgotten him. The guardians were smiling and satisfied. Mrs. Miles wrote in unmistakable delight, and said she was sure to get a holiday in order to attend her dear child's wedding.

All looked fair and promising. Edith herself felt convinced she had done well and wisely in accepting so kind, so considerate a suitor, and was thankful that the question of her future destiny was at rest; but she longed intensely for the moment of meeting with Mrs. Miles, her one real old friend.

She was almost embarrassed by the numberless rings and lockets and little costly "charms" to hang to her watch-chain with which Leslie loaded her.

"I shall never be able to wear them all. Pray do not bring me presents every day," she begged.

"Very well. To hear is to obey. Only whenever I see anything extra pretty, I am seized with an irresistible desire to buy it for you," urged Beaton.

It was finally decided that only such portions of Miss Vivian's trousseau as were suited to traveling should be prepared, and the rest was to be in readiness for her on her return to London.

And now the last week of Edith's girlish life had begun; on Thursday she was to become Mrs. Leslie Beaton, and at the thought of the near metamorphose she felt a curious uneasy creepiness.

The truth was, that Beaton had begun to get a little tired of the part he had hitherto played with such spirit and judgment. He was not less attentive or ready to lavish presents on his *fiancee*, but he unconsciously fell back into his old mocking tone, which was perhaps slightly harder, because it was somewhat trying to his equanimity to know that "Lady Mary Stanley Brown" had started on her wedding-tour just ten days before he was to set out on his own.

Edith felt rather than perceived the indefinable change;

she told herself she was nervous, childish, unreasonable; but a vague unpleasant impression would grow upon her, that Leslie Beaton, keen, jesting, brightly hard, was a more natural man than the quiet, kindly, sympathetic Beaton, who seemed to understand her thoughts before she uttered them.

"You are not keeping up to the mark, Leslie," said his sister one evening, just three days before that fixed for the wedding. "You are allowing the old original Adam to peep out. I saw Edith's eyes grow moist and sad when you were talking so wittily about Mr. and Mrs. Wandesford and their quarrels. You *ought* to remember she does not understand our shibboleth."

"Heavens and earth! can I ever forget it? The sweet little Quakeress is too excruciatingly in earnest. But *you* ought to remember what a desperate drill I have gone through. Is it to be wondered at that I break out at last? Never mind, I am going to buy her *the* ring to-morrow, and I shall be as meekly courteous and tenderly observant as a young knight in a mediæval romance."

* * * * * * *

The "to-morrow" broke brightly and softly. Edith had lain long awake, thinking over her quiet past, its peaceful if unbroken monotony. If the future promised more color and variety, would it be as free from pain? Be that as it might, she could do nothing now to change her fate, and she would not weaken herself by dwelling on possibilities of evil.

But the self-commune told upon her, and when Beaton, as usual after luncheon, followed her to the drawing-room, while Mrs. Winington prepared to go out, he asked with an air of the deepest, tenderest solicitude what had disturbed or distressed her, as she looked pale and sad. His question brought back her color, and with it a sense of guilt at having allowed herself to doubt the kindness and affection of the man who looked so lovingly into her eyes, and spoke in

tones so anxiously inquiring. Of course she assured him she was well and happy, and they talked for a few minutes with renewed confidence on Edith's part. As Leslie was gentle, grave, all that he ought to be, she felt once more at ease with him.

"I have ventured to bring you yet another ring," he said at length, drawing a very small parcel from his pocket; and unfolding the silver paper in which it was wrapped, he produced a plain gold ring. "It is as well to ascertain if it is the right size," he added, with a smile, and was in the act of trying it on her finger, when a solemn footman entered, and addressing Edith, said:

"There's a gentleman, 'm, as says his name is Vivian asking to see you."

"Vivian!" echoed Edith, amazed. But she had scarcely uttered the word when a tall, very tall man, exceedingly brown and sunburned, with dark hair and keen hazel eyes, appeared behind the startled Thomas, and pushing him aside strode into the room, stopping short in the middle. He was clothed in a black velvet coat, dark trousers very loose about the ankles, and held a soft gray felt hat in one ungloved brown sinewy hand. A gaunt bony figure, and extremely unlike those usually seen in "my lady's chamber."

After one comprehensive glance around the room he fixed his piercing eyes on Edith, and asked in a rough voice, "Are you my cousin, Edith Vivian?"

"I am Edith Vivian," she returned, rising in her extreme surprise, "but I do not think I have any cousins."

"No, I dare say not," he returned, with a big laugh.

"Pray, who are you, sir?" asked Beaton, haughtily, advancing between his *fiancee* and the intruder.

"I am David Vivian, her uncle George's only surviving son," nodding to Edith. "But she never even heard of me, I suppose. Our fathers parted years ago. And you" —sharply—"I suppose you are her sweetheart? I am glad

to make your acquaintance, sir. Shake hands, Cousin Edith. I'll be pleased to come to your wedding as your nearest of kin," and he sat down unasked in one of the brocaded velvet chairs that stood near him.

Beaton looked at him, a slight smile stealing around his mouth. He was too sure of his own position, too much a man of the world, to be disturbed by the intrusion of any eccentric relative. He would neither be uncivil nor admit his claim.

"Well, my good sir, you can not expect Miss Vivian to accept you as a relative without something in the way of credentials. Very possibly what you say is correct, but—"

"Ah, I understand. Well, I have left all my papers, that is, the attested copies—catch me parting with the originals—with that old fellow down in—what do you call it, the lawyers' kraal—the Temple. *You* know him. Your guardian, I mean," to Edith. "He seems in a great taking. He told me you were to be married on Thursday, so I made tracks as fast as I could to have a look at my little cousin, and let her know I've a sense of justice, and though I'll have my rights, every inch of them, I'm not going to be hard on a young lady, and a pretty one into the bargain."

An awful fear shot through Beaton's soul. Was this a claimant for Edith's inheritance?

"If you are a cousin," she exclaimed, "I shall be very glad, for I don't seem to have any one belonging to me, and you are a little like a picture of my father's brother George that hangs in the parlor at home."

"Good! shake hands on it. *You* look like an honest straightforward girl. I suspect you're in luck, sir," turning to Beaton, after shaking Edith's hand vigorously.

"May I ask to what rights you allude?" asked the former, with cold gravity.

"The right to all my uncle John's real estate," returned the stranger promptly. "I intend, in justice to myself, to prove who I am, and to what I am entitled; but I

sha'n't be greedy if you are friendly. Now, as I feel strange, not to say lost, in this monstrous big place, and you seem to have a roomy house, I suppose I may as well take up my quarters with you?"

Edith looked white and half frightened. Beaton was too confounded to reply, so his young *fiancee* explained—

"This is not my house, nor Mr. Beaton's. It belongs to his sister, Mrs. Winington, with whom I am staying. Mr. Beaton does not live here."

"Ha! that alters the case. Well, a man on board the steamer with me told me to put up at the Tavistock Hotel. I only arrived late last night, so I'll just stay on there. I have a lot of business to look after. You see I have been away up at the diamond diggings, and further, with some fellows that were hunting for gold and feathers, so it was more than two years since I left Cape Town. When I came back a couple of months ago, I met an old friend of my father's who had been home to England. He told me of the uncle's death, and the property he had left, and how it had all been seized by my cousin—naturally enough, naturally enough. I just took the next steamer home, and here I am. I don't think you are too glad to see me."

"You must admit your appearance on the scene is a little startling," said Beaton, with praiseworthy self-possession. "Have you seen Mr. Dargan, the more active of the two guardians?"

"Not yet. The other old boy talked of him, and seemed too frightened to say yea or nay without him."

"Suppose we go and call on Dargan together," said Beaton pleasantly. "I don't want to make myself ridiculous by oversuspicion, but I am sure you are too much a man of the world to expect that I should take you simply on your own word?"

"Right you are, by George," cried the stranger, starting up. "Come along, then; I'll see you again, my pale

little cousin." Another strong grasp of the hand, and he strode out of the room as abruptly as he had come in.

Beaton paused a moment to say, "This threatens to be a serious affair, Edith. You had better keep out of that Hottentot's way. I'll tell Somers to send Jean to you as soon as she comes in; let her know everything," and he went hurriedly out of the room.

Edith stood quite still where he left her, with a curious dazed feeling, as if she had been suddenly roused from a dream, and was not yet quite awake. She had a very vague idea of what it all meant.

If this stranger was really a cousin she would be glad. His face was kindly in spite of his keen, almost fierce eyes, and he might be a friend. Her clearest impression was that Mr. Beaton—she had not yet arrived at calling him Leslie, even in her thoughts—was very gravely and certainly not pleasurably affected by his sudden appearance. Why should he be? What were the rights he talked about? and what had she to do with them? Mrs. Winington no doubt could answer, and until she came in it was useless to conjecture.

So Edith turned to leave the room and sequestrate herself in her own. As she did so her eyes fell on the wedding-ring which Beaton had been in the act of trying on when her self-called cousin broke in upon them.

It had been thrown aside, paper and all, on a small tea-table, utterly forgotten by the donor. Edith took it up with a sort of prophetic doubt. "How will the coming of this strange man affect our life?" She only thought that if this Vivian, as he called himself, proved really to be her relative, it might worry Beaton to associate with him. This, however, could not matter much; still an uncomfortable presentiment that unpleasant changes were at hand oppressed Edith as she folded up the ring and placed it in a little silver coffer, one of the many ornaments scattered

about, for she neither liked to keep it herself, or leave it to be swept away by the house-maid's duster.

At last, reaching the shelter of her own room, she took refuge from her confused thoughts in a book Maitland had once recommended.

Reading had become a great delight to her since Mrs. Winington left her so much to herself. Her mind, her character were rapidly maturing, and no absorbing passion for the man she was about to marry interfered to check their growth.

She was interrupted after more than an hour had elapsed by a tap at her door, immediately followed by the entrance of Mrs. Winington in her out-door dress.

"They say you want to speak to me, Edith."

"Yes; I want to speak to you very much," and she drew forward an easy-chair. "I—we rather, Mr. Beaton and myself—had a visit from a wild-looking man who says he is my cousin," and she described the interview very accurately.

As Mrs. Winington listened she grew graver and graver, her mouth closing tightly. When Edith ceased to speak, she said, almost in Beaton's words—

"This is very serious. If this man turns out to be what he represents himself, it will change your fortunes considerably."

"Why will it change my fortunes?" asked Edith.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Winington, not heeding her, "were your uncles older or younger than your father?"

"I do not know."

"You see, if this man *is* your cousin, and the son of your father's elder brother, he is entitled to inherit before you, and the bulk of the property will go to him. But it is most likely a bold attempt to extract money. He will probably offer to compromise matters, but we will look narrowly into his pretensions, so do not worry yourself, dear, until you know more."

"No, I shall not. I always had enough, you know; and there is the cottage. I suppose he can not take *that*—it was my father's?"

Mrs. Winington looked at her with an expression half wondering, half contemptuous.

"You are right not to meet trouble half way. I can only hope this man will prove an impostor; if not—" She stopped abruptly. "It won't do to think about. Leslie has gone down with him to Mr. Dargan, has he; I shall not go out till he returns. Come with me, dear," she added, kindly. "I do not like to deny myself to some people I rather expect will come in to tea. What shall you do?"

"I will come with you; I have no objection to meet people," said Edith. "Why are you so frightened about me? surely you disturb yourself too much."

"Perhaps so. Well, change your dress, and join me in the drawing-room."

Mrs. Winington left her abruptly, thinking as she went, "Dress indeed! If this horrid man proves his story, who is to pay for the lovely trousseau I have chosen? It will half ruin poor Edith. What a little idiot she is! yet I rather like her when she does not interfere with me. How terribly awkward it will be for Leslie if he is obliged to break with her! No doubt the nastiest part of the business will be given to *me*. Men always expect their dirty work to be taken off their shoulders by their sisters, their mothers, or their wives."

Mrs. Winington was not less amiable and agreeable to her numerous visitors that afternoon for the unpleasant anticipations weighing on her mind. But she took the precaution of appearing in an exceedingly becoming hat, as a hint that she was going out, and that her guests had better not stay too long.

Edith, who since her engagement was announced had grown more assured and self-possessed, feeling she had a certain right to her position in Mrs. Winington's house,

talked a little and listened a good deal to one or two heavy dowagers, who pronounced her a nice, sensible, lady-like girl; and it was just like the luck of those Beatons to fall in with an unobjectionable heiress.

Mrs. Winington observed her with surprise and some compassion. How little she realized the breakers ahead, breakers which might swamp her! Her eyes often sought the clock. "When would these tiresome people go? when would Leslie return?"

That gentleman, meanwhile, lost no time in hailing a hansom, into which he motioned the strange claimant politely to enter first, and as they rolled away swiftly to Cursitor Street, Beaton could not help smiling at the notion of his temporary companionship with the man who might rob him of the fortune he already counted his own. They scarcely spoke, though Vivian occasionally exclaimed at the crowd, the fine horses, the numbers of people waiting to cross here and there.

Arrived at Dargan's office, they found him already closeted with Mr. Tilly, and were obliged to wait a few minutes in the outer office, which was a shade or two dingier and grubbier than the other.

When they were shown into Mr. Dargan's room, they found that gentleman in an evident state of perturbation, his wig considerably awry, and a couple of pens stuck behind his ear; he was examining some papers which lay on the table. Mr. Tilly stood behind him, looking very pale, his double glasses held to his eyes with trembling fingers.

Dargan jumped up and seized Beaton's hand, exclaiming—

"A most extraordinary event, a most unfortunate business! A—this—a—is the gentleman in question, I presume?" turning his eyes with an expression of dislike and dread at the tall, audacious-looking stranger who towered above him.

"Yes," said Beaton; "I thought it as well to come on here at once, and get to the bottom of the affair."

"And I think it is as well to give you this address," said Vivian, taking a piece of paper from his pocket. "Mr. J. Wolff, Jackson and Wolff, Colonial Brokers, Moorgate Street, E. C. There you are. Wolff knows me from a boy, though I haven't seen him for several years. He knew my father, too. I met him by chance after I left you," nodding to Tilly, "this morning. You'll find you can't dispute my identity, so make haste and get through all the necessary formalities, and," turning to Beaton, "if you show me a proper spirit, you and my cousin Edith will find I am no niggard. There are my papers; you just look through them, and you'll see they are all in order."

"I think," said Mr. Tilly, with some hesitation, and an attempt to be imposing, "it would be more correct, more decent, sir, if you were—a—to—a—absent yourself during our examination of these documents."

"All right. You know where to find me."

"Stay," exclaimed Beaton. "Have you put your affairs into the hands of a solicitor?"

"No."

"Take my advice; ask your friend Mr. Wolff to recommend you one at once. In a matter of this kind the principals had better not meet."

"It's such plain sailing, I do not see the need," began Vivian, but he was borne down by a chorus of assurances that it was absolutely necessary; and finally, with a careless nod to the rest, he started to find his friend, and a legal adviser.

"Do you believe this fellow's story?" asked Beaton, throwing himself into a chair.

"I'm sure I do not know what to think," said Tilly, dejectedly.

"And I'm sure I don't know what to do," cried Dargan, nibbling the top of his pen with a look of vicious irritation.

"I knew William Vivian, Edith's father, had two brothers; the elder, John, who left the property, and another, George, ne'er-do-weel, was always wandering about the world; he was the captain of a trading vessel, but drank hard, and went to the deuce. Why, you haven't heard of George Vivian, Mr. Tilly, for—how long?"

"Over thirty years," returned Tilly; "and as to his being married, I don't believe he ever was. The last I heard of him was when some clergyman in Cape Town wrote to my poor friend that he was in sore distress, and not fit to do anything. William sent him ten pounds."

"And what do these papers show?" asked Beaton, his pleasant, careless face clouded over with a look of angry impatience, sterner and more threatening than it seemed capable in its ordinary mode of expression.

"There are duly attested copies of his father's marriage certificate, the register of his own birth, and a letter purporting to be from a banker in Natal, stating that he always knew the bearer, David Vivian, to be the son of George Vivian and Margaretta Capini, his wife, a distant relation of the writer's. The boy, it seems, was left an orphan when about sixteen, and owed his means of existence to this banker Dreyer. He seems to have been not too steady, by what he told Mr. Tilly," continued Dargan, handing each paper as he described it to Beaton. "Three years ago, before the death of John Vivian, he went off to the diamond fields, and then went wandering away ostrich hunting, and the Lord knows what. On his return he heard by accident, from an old acquaintance of his father's, who had been over in England, that John Vivian had left a large estate, that a young girl had come in for it, and asked if he (this David) had any claim; so here he is—an ugly customer, I can tell you, especially if the man he mentioned, Wolff, knows him. Jackson and Wolff is a first-rate firm."

"We must look well to the authenticity of these certificates. What do you intend to do?" asked Beaton.

"Send out an agent to Cape Town," began Tilly.

"Ay! and who is to pay for it?" interrupted Dargan, with a sneer. "If this man proves the heir, Edith Vivian will not get over a thousand pounds or so. One of John Vivian's last acts was to invest nearly all his loose capital in the purchase of building land near Birmingham—a first-rate bargain, but with the other estates bought by him, it is of course real property, and so passes to the nephew."

"It looks bad for my poor little ward," said Mr. Tilly, with much feeling. "I think you had better submit the case for counsel's opinion."

"There's nothing to give an opinion about," cried Dargan, with a vicious snap. "If this Vivian's assertions are true, why he takes nearly everything. It's too, too unlucky altogether."

"Well, as the young lady's nearest friend and guardian," said Tilly, "I shall write to this Mr. Wolff and ask for an interview. For the present I will bid you good-day. I am a good deal upset—a—I shall see you early to-morrow."

Beaton stood up while he left the room, and then drawing his seat close to Dargan's table, looked full at the latter, saying in a low tone—

"Our bargain is at end, I suspect. I am in a devil of a mess."

"I dare say you are; but what's your disappointment to mine? My hard earnings, the poor little profits I counted on, torn out of my grasp, and this—this unscrupulous digger (for I am afraid his claim is irresistible) routing out all the accounts I have kept so—so carefully, picking holes with what I did for the best, and misinterpreting my honest intentions," and in the agony of his anticipations, Dargan seized a penknife and began vehemently scratching out a blot on the letter he had been writing when Tilly had broken in with his evil tidings.

"Ay, I suspect he'll skin you," said Beaton, cruelly.

"Look here, do you think we shall be obliged to admit his claim?"

"Things look like it."

"And my wedding is fixed for the day after to-morrow, by Jove! I am at my wit's end. If I break with Miss Vivian, and this man turns out an impostor, I shall be sold indeed. If I marry her, and he succeeds, I shall be ruined and undone. Come what may, the wedding must be put off."

"I don't care a rap what you do," cried Dargan, with a ghastly grin. "Your elegant sister may help the lame dog over the stile. *I* have enough to do with my own affairs. It was an evil hour for me when I first saw you."

"I wish you good-morning, Mr. Dargan," cried Beaton in a fury, and seizing his hat he went rapidly down-stairs.

CHAPTER X.

BROKEN BONDS.

THAT night, after they were alone, Beaton and his sister held high counsel. She was as usual the more hopeful and energetic of the two. Beaton was convinced that the Hottentot (as he termed him) was the person he assumed to be. Mrs. Winington would not believe it till some further examination had corroborated his statement.

"You *must* hold on, Leslie, for a few weeks. Suppose this Vivian, as he calls himself, turns out an impostor, how furious you would be with your own poltroonery!"

"But what is to be done? the wedding is fixed for Thursday. I am on the brink of a precipice."

"What a stupid fellow you are, Leslie! You don't suppose I want to commit you irrevocably? No, you must put off the marriage."

"What possible excuse can I urge?"

"There is one before your eyes. The settlements now

just ready for signature are nullified, or would be if this man's claims hold good. Of course *if* we were certain her claim to the property could not be shaken, it would be a good opportunity of doing the passionate, and dispensing with settlements altogether,'' she laughed. "As it is, you must allow yourself to be persuaded by *me* for Edith's sake to give up the immediate ceremony; she will never suspect anything. Then if hers is the losing side you can back out. I am quite sorry for poor Edith, she will be adrift again.''

"She will not break her heart, that you may rely on. Personally, I shall not be sorry to be clear of the whole affair. She is a nice little thing, and desperately sensible, but I am bored to death. I wish to Heaven you or Winington would give me a hundred pounds. I am certain if I went to Monte Carlo now I would break the bank, if there's any truth in the French proverb, 'Lucky in love, unlucky at play,' and *vice versâ.*''

"I think I will broach the subject to her to-night,'' said Mrs. Winington, who had not listened to him. "I have already stopped all preparations for the wedding. What do you say, Leslie; shall I speak to Edith to-night?''

"Yes; do by all means. In fact I am dying for sleep, and will go and forget my troubles for a few hours. I leave myself entirely in your hands, Jean. Whatever conditions you make I shall fulfill, except a hasty marriage; and you will think of that hundred for Monte Carlo? *This* game is played out. Be sure you see Colonel Winington's solicitors to-morrow—leave the whole thing in their hands.''

Beaton gone, his sister, after a moment or two of thought, determined not to disturb Edith; it was late, and the girl looked pale and tired when they separated for the night. It was a deplorable business altogether.

Colonel Winington had decided offhand that this self-styled Vivian was a rascally impostor, and for his part he would see his little friend Edith through, even if it cost him some

money. He never knew of a harder case. It was deucedly shabby on Beaton's part to back out, and yet how they were to manage without money he couldn't tell.

Edith had only felt vaguely disturbed. She saw that Beaton was greatly preoccupied. Her sympathy, the outcome of gratitude and a sense of dependence upon her *fiancé* had made her feel anxious to comfort him in some way. Yet an instinctive feeling that any advance on her part would be unacceptable held her silent and still. It was a little remarkable that Beaton made no attempt to speak with her alone, no effort to impart his uneasiness, or to ascertain if *she* too were depressed.

It was rather a relief to Edith when Mrs. Winington sent for her next morning, and opened the subject of the wedding.

"Poor Leslie is half crazy, dear," she said, as she drew Edith to sit beside her on a sofa in her dressing-room. "I begged him to let me tell you I have insisted on your marriage being postponed for a week or two, as much on your account as anything else. You see, if this dreadful African turns out to be really your cousin, the deed of settlement which was prepared would be useless, and your interests must be cared for."

"Thank you," said Edith. "But I do not understand having any interest separate from—from Mr. Beaton's."

"Very nice and sweet of you to say so, but sentiment is quite out of place in matters of business. Another thing, dear; if it turns out that this cousin can rob you of your fortune, poor Leslie must get some appointment before he can have a home to offer you." Mrs. Winington watched her narrowly as she spoke.

"Why not?" asked Edith, quietly. "I am very young and ignorant; I should, perhaps, make a better wife later on."

"She is utterly indifferent to him," thought Mrs. Winington, "and it will be harder to enlighten indifference

than love." But she said aloud, "It is a comfort to speak to so sensible a girl. Now there is no use in being miserable, put on your cream surah and lace dress, and Colonel Winington shall drive you down to the Crystal Palace. You are quite a favorite with him, and he hasn't a thing to do, while I have no end of bothers; really, I don't know why I trouble so much about other people," concluded Mrs. Winington, with the air of a martyr, and a sigh of relief at the prospect of being free from Edith's presence for a whole day.

A very unpleasant interval succeeded this sudden reversal of all their plans. Beaton absented himself a good deal, and when he joined his sister and Edith, was so moody and preoccupied that the latter was half-frightened at the complete change in her hitherto observant and debonair lover.

During this period Mr. Vivian called more than once, but was stoutly refused; the bland butler reported to Mrs. Winington that "he used quite 'orrid language, and threatened to lift me out of the road next time if I didn't let him in. It's very trying to have that kind of thing shouted out in the very ears of the policeman passing by." In the butler's opinion the gentleman was a dangerous lunatic.

Finally, Messrs. Touchette and Prigg, the learned and respectable solicitors of Colonel Winington, advised their client and his brother-in-law that Mr. David Vivian's claim was not to be disputed, and that the sooner matters were settled in a friendly spirit the better for Miss Vivian's interests.

* * * * * * *

"I must make an end of it," said Beaton, who was walking up and down his sister's morning-room, addressing that lady, who was writing letters. "I'll go to her directly she comes in, and just tell her our engagement must be at an end. It's all a mockery hanging on in this way. Where is Edith gone?" he concluded.

"To meet that very objectionable cousin of hers at Mr. Tilly's chambers, and have everything explained to her. I wonder how much she will understand of it?"

"More than you think. I fancy she'll be as sharp as any of you at five-and-twenty—all she wants is cultivation; she will always have the advantage of a slow circulation."

"Why, Leslie, you really seem to dislike that very inoffensive little girl."

"No; but I resent the loss of time and the immense amount of trouble she has cost me."

"I am sure *your* time is not of much value."

"I have a few lines from Lady Mary this morning. She is puzzled at not seeing my marriage in the papers. They are at Innspruck, and intend wintering in Florence. I wish I had a few pounds to risk at Monte Carlo."

"Leslie, you are an idiot."

Mrs. Winington went on with her writing, while her brother talked at intervals without receiving much attention.

Seeing this Beaton seized a book, and settled himself in an easy-chair. He had not read long when he was interrupted by the entrance of Edith, followed to his surprise by Vivian, who was got up rather picturesquely. His black velvet coat was open and showed no waistcoat, but a good deal of very white shirt, a broad leather belt and buckle, and a red silk handkerchief tied loosely around his throat, gave him the air of a bandit who had made his money and retired from business.

Edith looked very grave, but in no way disturbed.

"Well, dear, I hope you have got through this unpleasant business satisfactorily," said Mrs. Winington, rising with a smile, and determined to make things as pleasant as she could. "Mr. Vivian, I presume?"

"Yes, I'm David Vivian, and, as I said before, now that I have asserted my rights I'll show you I am no cur-

mudgeon; I'll be a real kinsman to my cousin, though I have robbed her of the inheritance you thought she had."

"The robbing has been on my side, I am afraid," said Edith, taking the chair Beaton brought for her, while David Vivian leaned on the back of a large old-fashioned sofa opposite Mrs. Winington. "Mr. Dargan has been explaining to me that the money I have been spending so freely of late is really my cousin's, and ought to be refunded."

"I don't want it," said Vivian abruptly and firmly; "if I did, that snuffy old liar ought to pay me out of the savings of your long minority. I haven't done with him yet. I have been down in Liverpool to interview Mrs. Miles, and got at more than her precious brother knows. You and she never spent more than a hundred and fifty a year; you *couldn't* from what she tells me. Now what has Dargan done with the difference? He is a sort of chap that would pick a penny out of a blind man's hat."

"Your cousin is quite graphic," said Mrs. Winington to Edith, with a pleasant laugh.

"Dargan is an unprincipled old scoundrel, "cried Beaton heartily.

"Yes, my cousin Edith has been plundered and bamboozled. I shall be glad to see her safe under the protection of a good honest fellow," and he nodded approvingly to Beaton. "Now I tell you what it is; you've all been bothered and put about by my turning up, and you haven't behaved bad. Come to my hotel to-morrow between nine and eleven, Mr. Beaton, we'll talk over the new marriage settlements, and you'll see I am prepared to do the thing handsomely. Get matters put square as fast as you can, and then you sha'n't be kept apart any longer; it has been a rough time for both of you."

He smiled a patronizing but good-natured smile. Then drawing himself to his full height, he added, "I've led a queer life, a life that would make *you* open your eyes," to

Beaton, "much as you know, but it hasn't made a heartless blackguard of me. Now I'll go; I don't want to trouble you with more of my company than is needful. I am not your sort," turning to Mrs. Winington, "nor you mine. Once my cousin is out of your house, I'll never enter it again. But I have a right to look after her, and *I'll do it*, so good-morning." He shook hands with Edith, then grasping Beaton's with startling energy, "To-morrow, then," he said, "before eleven, we'll soon put things straight," and stalked out of the room.

Mrs. Winington rang the bell, exclaiming, "Quite an effective exit, I declare;" then catching an expressive glance from her brother, she continued, "Now I shall leave you; I dare say you have plenty to talk about."

"Plenty to talk about?" repeated Beaton, as soon as the door closed upon her. "No, rather one painful topic that I dread and evade." He spoke very gravely, yet with a certain coldness in his tone, and paused.

"Do not fear to speak to me on any topic," returned Edith, looking kindly and candidly at him.

"Mine is an ungracious task," resumed Beaton, beginning again to pace the room, "but I must not shrink from it. I feel it only just toward you to set you free from any engagement to myself. I will not drag you down to poverty for my own selfish gratification. No, Edith, I release you, and trust you will have a fairer lot than to share the banishment that must be my destiny."

Edith was greatly amazed, and even affected. She was so profoundly convinced of his deep and warm attachment to herself, so utterly unsuspecting of the heartless plot contrived to gain possession of her fortune, that she never hesitated to offer with simple kindness to share his destiny, however dark or repulsive.

"I am not easily frightened," she said, with a sweet smile and downcast eyes that might well have charmed a true lover. "I should not be worthy to be your wife if I

shrunk from sharing the rough as well as the smooth places in your road. *I* have not been accustomed to luxury or finery, and I may yet be as really necessary as you used to say I was."

"Good heavens!" thought Beaton to himself, "she is not going to let me off. I was right; she is sharper than Jean imagined. My dear girl," he said aloud, in a more natural manner, "you really don't know what you are talking about. Life is very costly, even to a miserable bachelor, but when it comes to married life, it is a crime, it is positively indecent, to marry with insufficient means. So long as there was enough, I was far too much in love to care on which side the money was. Now all is changed. I should cut my throat if I saw you as my wife badly dressed, worried about dinner, degraded by household cares! Then existence would be insupportable to myself if I had not the decencies of civilized life about me, and mere decencies require a large income. No, dear Edith, marriage is out of the question. Let us conquer all selfish weakness, and part."

His voice even more than his words enlightened Edith; a sudden consciousness that he wanted to get rid of the engagement dawned upon her with vivid mortifying clearness.

"Very well," she said in a low tone, raising her eyes steadily to his; "if I am not necessary to your happiness, the engagement had much better come to an end. But why did you tell me what was not true? Can a fortnight have destroyed what you told me was so deeply rooted in your heart?"

"My dear Edith," cried Beaton blithely, beginning to see land at last, "you should make allowance for my feeling that I was by no means essential to you. Come now, be candid, and let us part friends. You are not a bit in love with me?"

"I do not know much about love, Mr. Beaton, but when you assured me that you loved me and could not face your

life without me, though I was greatly surprised, I believed you. I was very grateful; I should have grown to love you well. Now it is very unpleasant, but we can part without much suffering, so good-bye. I will send you all your many presents through Mrs. Winington; the *last*," with slight emphasis, "is, I believe, in the little silver casket on the red velvet table in the drawing-room."

Her simplicity and composure had a curious effect on Beaton. He felt as he could fancy a man might do after a horse-whipping—cowed and degraded.

"Believe me, I shall ever retain the warmest regard, the highest esteem," began Beaton, holding out his hand.

Edith looked at him with a smile, a grave quiet smile, gave him her hand for a moment, and left him. "That is well ended," he said to himself, with a quick shrug of his shoulders, as if throwing off a burden, "but she knows how to strike home. I must get hold of Jean."

Edith reached her room, took off her out-door apparel, folded it up neatly, and put it away as she usually did, but her cheeks were flushed and her hands trembled, indeed her whole nervous system quivered as from the effect of a great blow.

She had been deliberately rejected, she had been completely deceived. At last she understood the object of Beaton's devotion, the desperate need which he expressed for her lifelong companionship; he simply wanted her fortune to mend his own. What a weak, credulous creature she was to believe him! How he must despise her! how she despised herself!

It is true she was not in love with him, but fully believing his representation of his own feelings, she had grown accustomed to and pleased with the idea of a future spent in his kindly and congenial companionship. The notion of a settled home soothed and satisfied her. Now everything was wrenched away, she was despised, rejected, friendless. Her quiet home in the hands of strangers, her

good kind Mrs. Miles banished, where could she turn? Though as yet she did not connect Mrs. Winington with Beaton's falsehood, she longed to quit her house, to escape from the sights and sounds associated with her humiliation; she remembered that in the innocence of her heart she seemed to hold him to the engagement *he* was trying to break, and she could not control the angry, bitter sobs that shook her slight frame. Gradually, however, her quiet good sense came to her aid; she had really done nothing to be ashamed of, she had only yielded to Beaton after an urgent suit; she was more conscious of deserving Maitland's suspicion, though that also wronged her. Was she to blush because, being herself true, she believed Beaton to be the same? No, she would not allow herself to be overwhelmed, there was plenty to do and to learn. Her first effort must be to escape from Mrs. Winington's house. So having bathed her face and smoothed her hair, and made herself fit to be seen, if Mrs. Winington came or sent for her, she sat down and wrote shortly and clearly to her guardian, Mr. Tilly.

"Mr. Beaton and I have agreed to break off our engagement completely, as I have no doubt you anticipated. I therefore wish to leave Mrs. Winington's house as soon as possible. There is no one in the world with whom I can stay but Mrs. Miles. Do persuade Mr. Dargan to let her come to me, and we can stay for the present in the lodgings we had last spring. Do help me in this, dear Mr. Tilly.

"Always yours.

"EDITH VIVIAN."

Then she felt calm and equal to meeting Mrs. Winington.

These were dreadful days of trial to Mr. Tilly. He never knew when he was safe from the incursions of the reckless South African. No longer able to pass on all his responsibilities to the universal Dargan, nor to escape the searching

queries of the new heir, who fulminated the most tremendous accusations against the acting guardian, and almost called him rascal to his face.

The day after Beaton had succeeded in shaking off the shackles of his distasteful engagement, David Vivian descended on the victimized Mr. Tilly, before he had quite swallowed his breakfast.

"This is a pretty business," he ejaculated, throwing a letter on the table, and drawing a chair violently opposite to Tilly. "That hound Beaton has broken with Miss Vivian. There, read that! I appointed him to be with me this morning, to talk over a new settlement, and intended to make a handsome addition to my cousin's little fortune. I understood he agreed to come, and this morning by first delivery I got that precious epistle."

Tilly with an air of resignation took it up and read the contents. It stated in cold, clear terms that as Miss Vivian had never cordially responded to the writer's feelings, they had, after a calm and friendly discussion of their relative positions at present, agreed to put an end to their brief engagement; therefore, as there was no necessity for occupying Mr. Vivian's valuable time, Beaton begged to bid him adieu with all good wishes for his and his charming cousin's future happiness.

"Well, what do you think of that?"

"Ahem! I am not much surprised on the whole," said Tilly, slowly. "You see it was entirely a marriage of convenience on his part."

"Then why did you consent to it?" asked David, angrily.

"Well, you see it was hard to know what to do with the young lady, and Mr. Dargan thought—"

"Never mind what *he* thought! He'd sell her to the blackest imp in hell if he could make sixpence by the transaction! I suspect, for all he is such a fine gentleman, Beaton and your right-hand man understand each other."

"Not that I know of, not that I know of, I assure you, Mr. Vivian! He—" But Mr. Tilly was not destined to finish his sentence. Another letter was laid before him, which in his turn he handed to David. It was Edith's expressive little note.

"Ha! it is a regular split, then," cried David. "I suppose nothing is to be done?"

"Well, no, a breach of promise of marriage case is not to be thought of."

"No, by George! I was hesitating whether I should lick the scoundrel or not." He stretched out his right arm, and a fierce light came into his restless hazel eyes; then taking the letter from Tilly he read it over again, pulling his long mustache as he did so. "Yes, we must get her out of that house at once. I'll go over to Dargan and tell him I am going down to Liverpool this evening. I'll bring back Mrs. Miles with me to-morrow, and settle matters about lodgings and that. Shall I go and see Edith? No, I'd better not, I'd be kicking some one down-stairs. Give us pen, ink, and paper; I'll write a line and tell her to keep up her heart, and another, by Jove, to Beaton, telling him he is a good riddance. Suppose that poor young thing has given him her heart? What equity can adjust *that* balance? I have been in love a good many times myself, and I can tell you it's no joke. Where is your blotter?"

He made a hasty, vehement search among Mr. Tilly's belongings, to that neat and orderly gentleman's distress, and set himself to write, assuming the attitude of a spread eagle while at his task; but he covered the paper rapidly with large scrawling characters, occasionally pausing to look with an air of satisfaction at his work.

"There," he said, at length, when he had addressed the envelopes, and folding his notes, not too neatly, thrust them into the covers, "that will settle Mr. Beaton, and I hope my nice little kinswoman will feel she is not without a backer when she reads this. Mind you write too as kind

as you can. Now I'm off to Dargan: if he hasn't that statement of accounts ready it will be the worse for him. In whatever I may be obliged to undertake against him, I can, of course, count on your help, Mr. Tilly, otherwise you are an accomplice; and I believe you are an honest well-meaning man. Good-bye to you! I don't think I can see you till the day after to-morrow." He clattered away noisily, leaving Tilly in a state of collapse.

After awhile he pulled himself together, and went away in much agitation to see Dargan, whom he found in an indescribable condition of rage, despair, and terror—his wig awry, the tie of his high black neck-cloth twisted around under his left ear, his spectacles pushed up above his eyebrows.

"Oh, Mr. Tilly, it's you, is it? I little thought you would be talked over by that madman, to turn against your best friend, for that I have been to you, helping you every way I could, even to my own loss (there's half a year's interest due on the little loan I got you last autumn). And what right has he got to come here worrying over the savings of his cousin's minority? He'll turn against *you* next, mark my words. His friend, Mr. Wolff, was here yesterday, and says his mother was as mad as a hatter. What will he be after next? He can't even leave that stupid creature of a sister of mine alone. It's the devil's own bad luck that sent him here to upset everything, and give the lie to a better man than himself. Look here, now, I'll have nothing more to say to you and your ward; and how will you get on by yourself, I'd like to know?"

"You have been of very great service to me, I acknowledge, Mr. Dargan, but the affairs of the minor are not so complicated as to be beyond my power to—to conduct. I must say, I think you made a great mistake when you overruled me in the matter of that advertisement, and—"

"Lord, what a weather-cock you are!" interrupted the other, with a contemptuous upward toss of his chin. "I

was the cleverest chap in the three kingdoms when we planned it. Was it my fault that this rampaging digger has turned up to set the Thames on fire?" etc., etc., etc.

After much recrimination and squabbling, it was agreed on between the spider and the fly that everything must present a smooth surface to the new actor who had appeared so inopportunely to interfere with Dargan's little game, even if it cost money to repair a few of the well-meaning mistakes which unavoidably occurred from over-zeal in the minor's service.

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David Vivian's energy was of the feverish order. No sooner had he forced the tortured Dargan to write a few words to his sister, authorizing her to return to Edith, than he rushed off to Euston Square, and just caught a train reaching Liverpool early in the evening.

His errand explained, Mrs. Miles's heart leaped for joy. The astute reader need scarcely be informed that the suffering relative whose claims on her assistance drew her from Edith was an apocryphal personage. She eagerly carried out his wishes for an early start, and by the afternoon of the next day they were again in town, seeking admission to the lodgings occupied at the commencement of this true tale by Mrs. Miles and her charge.

To Edith the hours which intervened between her parting with Beaton and the moment of leaving Mrs. Winington were painful in an irritating sense. The consciousness of having been so completely deceived lowered her in her own estimation, and though far from perceiving how completely Mrs. Winington had been her brother's accomplice, common sense suggested that she could not be completely innocent of his schemes.

Indeed this interval was as distressing and irritating to Mrs. Winington as to her guest. Even Mrs. Winington's world-hardened self-possession was ruffled by the constant

presence of the guileless young creature she had assisted to blind.

Edith's composure and good temper commanded her respect. The girl seemed to have suddenly developed a quiet, unassuming womanly dignity, a degree of maturity which impressed her hostess. The only allusion she made to the sudden rupture of her engagement was when she gave Mrs. Winington the packet containing Beaton's gifts, saying—

"This is for your brother. You know what it is, I am sure. Do not let us say anything more about him. I have a note from Mr. Tilly, he promises to take me away to-morrow or next day at furthest, so I need hamper your movements no longer. You have been very, very good to me, whether you really like me or not, and I am heartily grateful!"

"My dear," cried Mrs. Winington, with tears in her beautiful eyes (they always came quite readily, unless she chose to keep them back), "no words can express how grieved and ashamed I feel. It is all too painfully fresh to talk about now. Later I hope to explain away some of the blame which naturally seems to attach to me." So saying she kissed her brow, patted her shoulder, and hurried away to give orders respecting the packing up and preparing for an almost immediate journey to Scotland.

When, the following day, toward evening, the automatic footman ushered "Mrs. Miles" and "Mr. Vivian" into the morning-room, where Edith was sitting with a book which she could not read, so highly strung were her nerves, it seemed as if the peace and hopefulness of her old life were restored to her in the solid, not to say stumpy, form of her good old friend. How she darted forward to throw her arms round her neck, to cover her honest homely face with kisses, to utter confused exclamations of pleasure! David Vivian stood looking on, both touched and surprised. He did not think his little cousin had so much warmth and tenderness. The next moment she was shy and downcast

again, as she turned to thank him softly, earnestly, for bringing her trusted friend back so soon.

"All right! I knew it was the best service I could do you. Now, are you ready to start? We have a place to take you to. I suppose you can come at once?"

"Yes, I can; but I am ashamed to say I have too much luggage for a cab."

"We'll call another then. Now go, get on your bonnet, and say good-bye if it's necessary. *I* don't want to see Madame Doubleface again."

"Mrs. Winington is out. I hardly like to leave without seeing her."

"Nonsense," growled Vivian, in his harshest tone. "Picking oakum is about what she and her brother deserve. I shall not leave you in this house, nor stay any longer in it myself. Hurry up, my little kinswoman."

Edith was somewhat afraid of David—his great height, his deep voice, his rugged manner made her shrink into herself. Moreover, she knew that any one looking at the bare facts of the case would not think her charming hostess deserving of much consideration, though she could not rid herself of a strong liking for her. She compromsied matters, however, by writing a few lines of adieu which she left in the hands of her maid, and hastily donned her out-door attire.

As soon as Edith had left the room Vivian applied himself vigorously to the bell, which immediately evoked the splendid apparition of Thomas.

"I say, get down Miss Vivian's boxes, and call another cab; look alive, will you, and there's for your trouble."

The tip was handsome enough to temper the supercilious expression of the functionary, who responded with a gracious "Thank'ee, sir," and retired to execute the "tipper's" commands.

It was with a new sense of safety and exhilaration that Edith found herself sitting down to a late tea. To be sit-

ting opposite Mrs. Miles in the old familiar fashion, as if the last couple of months had been an unsubstantial dream, was something so amazing and delightful that she could hardly persuade herself that her ardent desire was really fulfilled. She was tempted every now and then to catch her arm, or seize her hand, to assure herself that it was really her good friend in the flesh.

By degrees she mastered her excitement, and they fell into their old confidential tone. Edith, before she slept, had told the whole story of her engagement, and its mortifying conclusion. Over this recital she shed no tears, and the mental exercise seemed to clear her own impressions, and reveal to her the systematic deception practiced on her in its fullness. The strongest feeling left in her mind was a conviction that there was something in herself not lovable, as the man she liked had avoided her because she showed her liking, and the man who seemed to like her forsook her with unflattering readiness directly she proved deficient in those solid attractions which real and personal estate possesses.

She was glad to take shelter in the humble haven of Mrs. Miles's motherly companionship, and thought it would be long before she could bear the thought of a lover, if indeed she could ever believe in any man's professions. Mrs. Miles, who was much moved, wept a little and blew her nose a good deal.

"Ah, dear Miley," said Edith at the end of her story. "If you had not deserted me, I might have escaped a good deal. I should not have made so great a fool of myself."

"Ah, dear, but I couldn't help it," cried Mrs. Miles, eagerly. "I won't submit to seem a cold-hearted, selfish creature. I did not desert you of my own free will, that you may be sure. I never said a word against my brother before, but I am vexed with him, and you are wiser and older and won't betray me. I have had to obey him. He has been hard on me. You know I was left a widow with

one boy, a dear son, kind and gentle, but weak and easily led, and the good God only knows what I went through to give him food and clothes and a little schooling. At last I was struck down with illness, and then I was obliged to beg my brother for bread. He wasn't bad, for he gave me a trifle, and set me to look after you. My dear child, it healed my heart to have you to love. Well, my brother took Jimmie—you remember Jimmie?—into his office, and promised to do for him, but he was just an unpaid errand-boy. One unlucky day my poor boy, who had fallen in with bad companions, was tempted to try his luck at some game, and won and won, and then lost all. Joshua had, for a wonder, left some gold and notes just inside his drawer where he wrote, and my poor misguided boy took some of it, thinking he would win back everything. Then his uncle came in, missed the money, followed Jimmie, and caught him at play. Oh! it was an awful time! Well, he got back his money, for Jim was winning again; but he insisted on sending him ever so far away, to Hull, to a builder there—a very hard place; but Jim hadn't suffered to no purpose, he persevered, he was getting on nicely, he being trusted to pay the men, and I began to hope he might have a holiday and come and see me, when my brother writes to me that he has let the cottage, and that I must leave you, and keep away in spite of what you might say or do. I would not agree, and then he threatened to write off to Jim's employers and warn them not to trust him with cash, as he was a detected thief. What was I to do?"

Here Mrs. Miles rocked herself to and fro, covering her face with her handkerchief.

Edith knelt down by her, and soothed her with tender caresses, exclaiming with indignant fervor against Dargan's unfeeling harshness.

"But why did he want to separate us?" asked Edith with a puzzled look.

"Your cousin swears that Joshua sold you to Mrs. Win-

ington and her brother, but was sold himself, because he, Mr. Vivian, turned up. He is a kind, generous man, that Mr. Vivian. I can tell you it is a different matter traveling with him and with my brother. It was he insisted on my taking this drawing-room floor, because the rooms were fitter for you. He is kind and thoughtful."

"Yes, he is, he is indeed; but I am afraid of him; I don't know why, but I am certainly afraid of him."

"Nonsense, my dear; he will be a good, kind friend, and he will not stand any of Joshua's tricks. God forgive him, he has been no brother to me; many a sore heart I owe him."

"Well, thank Heaven we are together again," said Edith, drawing a chair, and laying her head on Mrs. Miles's shoulder. "I want no more finery, or grand people, only to be at rest and safe."

Then the tears stole from under her downcast lids, and she had the relief of a copious though quiet flood of tears.

CHAPTER XI.

AN INTERREGNUM.

David Vivian found ample occupation between his young cousin, of whom he constituted himself protector and champion, and Dargan, whose life he made a burden by his persistent searching into accounts and demanding vouchers. Under his influence Mr. Tilly began to assert himself somewhat, and occasionally paid his ward a visit. He was extremely gratified by her interest in some old prints he had picked up on his way to see her one day. She listened with evident pleasure to his explanations, and showed such quick perception that the old antiquarian offered to read her a few chapters of his unpublished work on monumental brasses.

He was very careful not to mention either Mrs. Wining-

ton's or Beaton's names, and once, when Edith, in the innocence of her heart, asked him how long he had known Mrs. Winington, he answered testily,

"Too long; and I don't want to hear any more about her. She has wasted such a quantity of your money on a lot of useless clothes; she can have no principle."

This conversation took place at tea one warm afternoon, and Edith was glad enough to let it drop. Soon after Mr. Tilly bid his ward good-bye and departed.

"It is a lovely evening," said Vivian, who had walked to and fro once or twice in silence, "one can hardly breathe in-doors. Get your hat, Edith, and your sketch-book; we'll have a hansom and drive up to Hampstead. There will be some air to be had on the heath. I'd like to see you draw a tree or a house on the spot. It seems a wonderful thing to be able to do it."

"Very well," said Edith, readily enough. She was always glad to shake off thought and memory by motion, and missed, more than she would have liked to say, her frequent drives with Mrs. Winington.

They were soon *en route*. Vivian, who was usually either profoundly silent or extremely talkative, lit his pipe without asking leave, and smoked without speaking till they reached "Jack Straw's Castle," where they alighted. He then knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and exclaimed with a sniff—

"Ah, the air *is* fresher up here; it may bring some color to your cheeks, little cousin. I don't like to see you so white."

"It's my nature, David."

"If you could get the breeze on one of the big wide plains of South Africa, or from a mountain-side, you would know how delicious air could be. Cities, and the crowds of men who build them, take the freshness and fragrance out of the atmosphere. Ah! I think you would like colonial life well enough." And he talked on, not badly, describing his

hunter's life, his adventures among the Boers, whom he greatly disliked, the character and career of a favorite horse, etc. Edith listened with interest and sympathy, asking a leading question here and there, and so, in good humor with each other, they reached a spot where Edith thought she might attempt a sketch.

In a hollow, widening as it sloped downward, displaying a country undulating far into the blue distance, stood a clump of beech-trees, and a thatched hut, possibly a shelter for some goats at night.

"I think I might manage that," said Edith, and looking round, found a suitable seat on the grassy edge of a small sandy hole. David relit his pipe, and lounging by her side watched her pencil with lazy pleasure.

Edith was not easily satisfied with her work and rubbed out a good deal; at last she succeeded in making a very fair representation of the scene before her, which elicited strong expressions of approbation from her cousin.

She began slowly to close and strap her book and pencil-case. Vivian rose, stretched himself, and sat down again. "I say," he exclaimed, as if making up his mind to some difficult utterance, "wasn't it rather nasty of old Tilly mentioning those clothes, hey?"

"He did not mean anything unpleasant," returned Edith, coloring faintly.

"Perhaps not; but I say, Edith, if you'd rather not have them wasted, or you'd like just to stamp out all memory of that unlucky business, I am quite at your service. Suppose you marry me?—then you know you'd get the property back again."

He looked at her earnestly as he spoke, but without the least of a lover-like expression.

Edith almost dropped her book. "What can have put such an idea into your head?" she exclaimed in profound amazement.

"Well, you see, it's the best sort of way to show Beaton

you don't care a rap about him, and it might make matters more comfortable for you; so—"

"You are kindly disposed to sacrifice yourself for my comfort. Thank you, David." And she laughed merrily, but not unkindly. "Why, you don't care the least for me."

"Yes, I do. I am very fond of you. I don't mean to say I am in love. I have been in love two or three times, and it was a desperate business each time. Now you see I'd like you to live with me always, but you are neither my sister, nor my niece, nor my daughter, so I must marry you if you don't mind. You really might do worse; I'm not so very much older than you, nor a bad-looking chap either, they tell me. You might keep me in order; we would have plenty of money, and grow fond of each other. Now just think it over."

"You are very kind," said Edith, still laughing. "I never thought any one would be so accommodating. But I must beg you to give up the idea of turning our friendly relations into anything closer. It will be a long time before I can bear the idea of marriage, after the narrow escape I have had. Seriously, let us never talk of this project again. I am sure you will agree with me, when you reconsider your kind wish to prevent my trousseau being useless."

She began to walk back to the road as she spoke. David kept silence for a few minutes, and then exclaimed abruptly, "All right. I suppose you know what you want, and I dare say you are a great deal too good for me, so we will say no more about it. I'll be your friend, only, if you change your mind, let me know."

"Oh, yes," said Edith, smiling; "I will propose for you in due form."

David laughed. "I'm your man if you will," he said. "I've not been as steady as I ought, and I've a notion that a wife and a home would settle me."

No more was said on the subject. Edith was a good deal startled and amazed, but her cousin seemed to forget the conversation so completely, he was so cheerfully unembarrassed, that she was soon at ease with him again, and attributed his astounding proposition to his habit of speaking out every whim and fancy that presented itself to his mind as he usually did when in a talkative mood.

He was rather irregular in his ways sometimes. He would come every afternoon and accompany Edith or Mrs. Miles in their shopping and their walks, or watch his cousin drawing and working, and read his newspaper, and write his letters in the little sitting-room, as if he was thoroughly at home. Then a week would elapse, and they saw nothing of him. When he reappeared he generally looked ill and haggard, with sunken eyes, and weary, listless aspect. He made light of his apparent indisposition, however, when Edith inquired kindly if he had been ill. "I've always been bothered with bad headaches," he said carelessly. "Sometimes they let me alone for a bit, then they come back harder than ever. I have had one or two bad bouts lately and as I am not fit to be spoken to, I keep out of the way when they come on."

Time had rolled on, and the days were growing crisp and short. Edith, though thankful to be at peace, and safe with her good old friend, was conscious of a slight monotony. She was ashamed to acknowledge how much she missed Mrs. Winington's bright, amusing companionship, her light, lively talk. She did not care for excitement, but something of variety she did need.

In spite of her regretful conviction that Maitland was a conceited coxcomb, she found herself often looking back to certain conversations with him which had given her infinite pleasure.

His strong dark face and grave sweet smile came before her mental vision far more frequently than they need,

though she always chased away the intrusive image, and hoped she might not encounter either again.

On the whole she was pleased and cheered when one evening, on returning from a drive with Mrs. Miles and Vivian, he suddenly exclaimed, "It's dull and dreary here now; why should you stay any longer? Edith looks like a ghost. She wants a sea-breeze; that's what would brace her up. What do you say? Where will you go?—there are lots of places. Just give me your commands. I'll look out quarters for you."

"It would be very, very delightful" said Edith with a sort of soft enthusiasm that was very charming in her. "I never saw the sea. Shall we go, Miley dear?"

"Oh, by all means. It's a good thought, Mr. Vivian; this dear child wants a change sorely."

"Where shall it be? I was down at Brighton the other day, and it's just a bit of London on the sea. Here's an old railway book; let's look at the advertisements—Scarborough, Llandudno, Ilfracombe. They are all too far; I want to run up and down, for I have lots to do in London still and I want to look after you at the same time. I think I am of some use."

"I am sure I don't know what we should do without you," ejaculated Mrs. Miles, heartily; then with some timidity, she ventured to suggest, "What do you say to Southsea? It's bright and lively with ships and soldiers, and the steamers to the Isle of Wight. I used to be there in my poor husband's time; he was an engineer on board one of the troop-ships."

"I think it might do very well; it is within two hours of town. I'll run down to-morrow and see what it's like."

"A great friend of mine," resumed Mrs. Miles, "used to keep a very superior boarding establishment toward Eastney way—a beautiful house with a conservatory, in its own grounds too. Poor thing, she had a great fight at first; her husband was paralyzed. It's years since I heard

of her. I'll give you her address, Mr. Vivian; you might inquire about her; if she is still alive she'll remember me. Her terms are high, but there's every comfort."

"Oh, we needn't put on the screw," returned David, who, though ready to exact the last farthing from Dargan, was lavish in his own expenditure, and in providing any luxury or amusement for the kinswoman he had taken under his somewhat tyrannical protection. "Will you give me a glass of milk and soda water," he continued, "and write the address for me. Put a line of introduction in an envelope, that is your best plan. I shall start early to-morrow. Tell your landlady here you will leave within the week; I'll settle you somewhere."

"Well, you *are* abstemious," cried Mrs. Miles, admiringly, as she bustled about to get him the beverage he had asked for. "You are almost a teetotaler?"

"Not quite," returned Vivian; "but this is the best drink of all."

"Is Southsea a pretty place?" asked Edith eagerly.

"Well, it has a beautiful sea, and view of the island opposite. It is flat enough, but the air is delightful, and it's so lively."

"Well, I'll report to you the day after to-morrow; so good-night to you. I will be off early to-morrow; and we will make all arrangements when I come back."

"How very kind he is!" cried Edith when he had left. "I wish—"

"What, my dear—what do you wish?"

"I wish I were not so afraid of him sometimes. When he walks up and down and seems looking at something far away that displeases him, I do not quite like to be in the room with him."

"Ah! that's only when his poor head has been bad. I'm sure he would do anything on earth for you."

Under David Vivian's energetic guidance things were soon in train for Edith's change of abode. He had suc-

ceeded in finding Mrs. Miles's old friend. She was still the proud proprietor of a very successful boarding establishment, and was highly pleased at the idea of receiving Mrs. Miles and her charge. The liberal arrangements of Mr. Vivian met her entire approval, and a few days saw Edith and her chaperon settled in Mrs. Parker's comfortable mansion—Trafalgar House.

The cab which conveyed them to Waterloo Station had not driven away many minutes when the front door bell sounded, and a gentleman, a broad-shouldered, dark-eyed man, inquired if Miss Vivian or Mrs. Miles was at home.

"They have just driven away, sir, to the train," said the servant.

"Do you know where they are going?"

"I am sure I do not, sir. Missis does, I think."

"Can I see your mistress?"

"She is out, sir. She was obliged to go before the ladies left."

"Ha! Did you happen to hear what station they were going to?"

"The gentleman told cabby 'Waterloo.'"

"The gentleman?—Mr. Tilly?"

"Mr. Vivian, sir."

"Well, I'll leave my card, at any rate."

"I'll give it to missus as soon as ever she comes in."

The card was inscribed "John Ogilvie Maitland."

Time had gone heavily with him since his last brief visit to London. He had been more severely hit than he at first thought, and the feeling of profound compassion for Edith, as the victim of Beaton's unprincipled schemes, helped to keep his tenderness for her constantly alive.

Then as days and weeks rolled by, and no announcement of the marriage Mrs. Winington assured him was to take place immediately appeared, he grew restlessly curious. Something must have happened to alter the condition of things, or the wedding, which it was obviously Beaton's

interest to hurry on, would not have been postponed. He did not like to write for an explanation to Mrs. Winington, whom he thoroughly distrusted. He would wait, and perhaps the mystery would solve itself in some delightful way that might leave a loophole available to himself. But this more cheerful view he resisted. He did not consider himself lucky, nor had he any great faith in his own powers of pleasing. So he waited and dreamed, though apparently completely occupied with the work of harvesting the fruitful fields of Craigrothie.

Early in August Mrs. Winington came to illuminate the hospitable mansion of Strathairlie with her bright presence. The day after her arrival she drove over with her hostess to visit her dear Mrs. Maitland, who, it must be confessed, did not receive her too warmly. This in no way affected Mrs. Winington, who was delightfully sympathetic, and even gushing in her memories of the dear old days when she was like one of Mrs. Maitland's own bairns. Jack was out, however, gone away too far to be recalled, while the major had ridden over to the nearest town to transact some business. There were then no members of the harder sex to be fascinated, and Mrs. Winington had the tact to leave no message for Jack, but trusted to the old attraction to draw him to her side.

Nor was she mistaken. The day but one after this visit being Sunday, a fine glowing August day, Maitland came over a little before luncheon, looking, Mrs. Winington fancied, darker and graver than ever.

He was welcomed with quiet warmth perceptible to himself only.

He made no attempt to speak to her alone, or to allude to their last meeting, but in the middle of a pause at table he asked, "What has become of Beaton?"

"I do not exactly know at this moment," she returned, with a meaning smile. "He is somewhere in the Tyrol, I think. But I have a good deal to tell you by and by."

The weather was so tempting that, after a proper interval of general conversation, Maitland turned with an expressive smile to Mrs. Winington, and asked her if she felt equal to walk as far as the bridge.

It was a well-known spot, and Mrs. Winington, with a quick glance into his eyes, immediately assented, and went away for her hat and parasol.

Maitland thought he had seldom seen a fairer woman as they left the house together. Her dress of thin pale brown or *ecru* stuff, with a red sash and ribbons, her wide-brimmed straw hat turned up at one side, where a couple of creamy roses lay on her rich hair, the softened, happy expression of her eyes, made up a lovely picture. How vividly the familiar scene recalled the adoration he once felt for his companion, and she was handsomer than ever.

"I suppose you are dying to know what has happened to break off Leslie's marriage?" she said, when they were well away from the house.

"I might survive a little longer without the knowledge, but I *should* like to know."

"Hasn't Leslie written to you since—since the bubble burst?"

"Not a line."

"What an idle fellow he is! He promised he would tell you everything, or *I* should have done so. Well, here is the story," and she described the sudden appearance of David Vivian, the irresistible character of his claim, and the consequent breaking off of the engagement with Beaton.

It was lightly and amusingly told, with a tinge of rose-color cast on Beaton's share in the business. Maitland listened in silence, and when Mrs. Winington raised her eyes to gather from his what he thought of her story, he had turned back to whistle for his dog.

"Really," he exclaimed, "this has been a trying affair. Beaton has gone off to the Continent you say? What has become of his loving *fiancee?*"

"Oh, she went back to her friend Mrs. Miles, and that queer old guardian of hers, the antiquarian. But, do you know, I don't think she cared a straw for Leslie; she was rather obtuse in some directions."

"Then she must have imposed on you very successfully, for in the last letter you were so good as to send me, you spoke of the extremely demonstrative nature of her affection—in short, it bored you."

"Did I?" said Mrs. Winington. "I suppose something suggested the idea to me at the time; but demonstrativeness does not prove deep affection."

"Certainly not," returned Maitland carelessly. "The most ardent caresses are no guarantee for fidelity, they are no doubt a matter of temperament."

Mrs. Winington colored.

"You are more philosophic than you were when we last walked here together."

"I should think so," said Maitland, laughing. "And if *your* ideas are not greatly changed since those primitive days, I must have bored you infinitely."

"Do you think you did?" asked Mrs. Winington, looking down at the heather through which they were walking.

"I dare not answer. Do you think you are equal to climb as far as the three pines? You remember them?"

"Remember them? yes," she replied, in a tone that said much more than the words.

Maitland struck into a sheep track that led up the side of the hill, at the foot of which brawled and chafed a river, which was sometimes little more than a burn, sometimes a wide-spreading torrent; and occasionally assisting his companion, oftener walking beside her, he conducted her to their old trysting-place, where three pine trees grew in a sheltered hollow open to the south, but completely fenced round at the back and sides. A wide stretch of country and all the approaches to this coign of vantage were per-

fectly visible, while those who stood or sat in the shadow of the rocks could hardly be perceived.

Maitland talked pleasantly and lightly of the past, of the character of the scenery, of many things, but Mrs. Winington was silent; she had intended that Maitland should, during this visit of hers to the old scenes, avow the bitter agony of feeling that she was lost to him. Then what a delightful task it would be to soothe him, to reconcile him to his life, to satisfy him with her tender friendship! Now she felt in some indescribable way that the mastery of the situation had passed out of her hands.

At last they reached the well-known spot.

Mrs. Winington seated herself on a mossy stone, and Maitland leaning against the stem of one of the trees, they both looked out over the fair scene before them for a minute or two, and then their eyes met. No need for words to tell either what the other was thinking of. A kindly playful smile slowly lit up Maitland's somewhat rugged face, and Mrs. Winington exclaimed, impulsively, "Jack, here, where we last parted, I humbly ask your forgiveness for my heartless, cruel conduct. I was so young and thoughtless. I was scarce responsible. How often since have I longed for a nature stronger, truer than my own to lean on, to—to love as I knew not how to love *then*. I am more lonely than you think, dear Jack. Let me hear you say that you can forgive me, and restore me to something like the position I *once* held in your esteem." She held out her hand, which he took and held for a moment, her beautiful lips quivering, her soft eyes all suffused.

"Ah, Jean," returned Maitland, touched for a moment, "a man might well forgive you much." Then in his usual voice, "My dear Mrs. Winington, I by no means deserve so ample an *amende*. I was a headstrong, conceited young blockhead, and dared to look too far above me; do not give a thought to the past if it brings you pain. I am glad to

see you surrounded by everything that can make life bright and pleasant."

"Everything!" echoed Mrs. Winington, turning her eyes full on his. "Yes, heaps of baubles, but nothing that can really satisfy the heart. My husband cares more for his horse or his dog than for me. I may do what I like, because he never needs my society. He—"

"Come, come!" interrupted Maitland, smiling. "No man ever adored a wife more than he does. I really must stand up for Colonel Winington; he may not be a hero of romance, but he is a right good fellow, and quite justifies the opinion you must have formed of him at *one* time."

"I had no opinion at all," she murmured, "I married him because I was told to marry."

"We none of us realize our early dreams," said Maitland, divided between his admiration for his fascinating companion and an earnest wish to show her his disapprobation of her conduct regarding Edith Vivian. "But your lot has fallen in pleasant places compared to the majority. Look at your quondam protegee, Miss Vivian—a mere shuttlecock between such battledoors as her guardian and intended husband, whose bowels of compassion are mere catgut. She is bought and sold, petted, blinded, flattered till the supreme moment when she is found wanting in her chief title to regard and consideration, and then she is at once dropped, disavowed, sent back to obscurity, from which she was dragged to suit the schemes of those who wished to appropriate her money. What would *you* think and feel had you been subjected to such treatment?"

"My dear Mr. Maitland, you are really quite excited. Of course it was all very bad, and I am ashamed of my part in the affair; but it was a great chance for Leslie. I did not like to lose it, I hoped all would turn out well. As it has, why, you could not expect Leslie to marry on nothing? It was unpleasant for Edith. *I* can not imagine being subject to such treatment myself, I confess," looking up with

a smile intended to be candid and winning; but Maitland's gravity did not relax.

"Yet Miss Vivian is a delicate, tender woman like yourself, with less strength, less experience, a simple innocent child, the soul of truth and honor. Why—"

"Why," interrupted Mrs. Winington, surprised at his tone—"why, Mr. Maitland, you seem to be absolutely in love with that very colorless, good little girl."

"I am," he returned, meeting her eyes fully and calmly. "I was interested in her from the first, but could not interfere with Leslie, who trusted me all through. Now I reproach myself with acting a cowardly and unmanly part, which, if I can repair, I will."

"Would you marry her?" with a gasp.

"Yes, if I am so fortunate as to win her, which is doubtful. I can fancy nothing sweeter, nothing to be more ardently desired, than to find her true eyes, her gentle, thoughtful face by the fireside to welcome one back after the troubles of the day. She is the very embodiment of home."

"It is a pretty picture," said Mrs. Winington, coldly, stooping to pick up a sprig of heather. "But I am feeling a slight chill. Shall we return? I see you think I have deserted your inamorata. It would be awkward and senseless to keep up with her under the circumstances. Besides, if I am any judge of indications, I suspect she will find a potent protector in her South African cousin."

Mrs. Winington rose decidedly, and though Maitland was most careful of her during their descent, the walk back seemed infinitely longer, infinitely more fatiguing, than when they were outward bound.

The day but one after this episode a telegram from Colonel Winington obliged his wife to curtail her visit very apruptly.

So soon as the harvest was safe, Maitland escorted his mother south to the winter quarters he had selected, and on

his way back called, as we have seen, fruitlessly at Miss Vivian's lodgings.

"I'll not give up though," he muttered, as he walked slowly down the street. "If—if only the cousin is not a formidable rival!—I'd like to see him."

CHAPTER XII.

BY THE SAD SEA WAVES.

THE first sight of the sea is an experience not to be forgotten by any one, especially by one loving nature and accustomed to watch her varying moods.

It was dark, and a misty rain had begun to fall when Edith and her companion reached Trafalgar House; she was therefore obliged to wait till morning for her first sight of the restless waters. But the indescribable odor of the soft salt sea-breeze was very new and delicious to her. She felt her spirits rise as if a fresh stream of ideas had been set in motion, and the weary languor which had oppressed her been swept away.

The travelers were cordially received. Mrs. Parker, a stout matron with rosy cheeks, a widow's cap, and a solid figure, professed herself overjoyed to meet Mrs. Miles again, and declared Edith to be a sweet young lady, quite a credit to her house, etc., etc.

Then she ushered them into their apartments. "And Mr. Vivian was most particular, I assure you. Nothing but the best would do for him. This is a new wing, Mrs. Miles; I built it myself over two years ago. You little thought when poor Parker first fell into bad health and retired, and all my troubles began, that I would be adding a new wing to the house, eh? But though I have got on wonderful I couldn't have done that, only a poor old gentleman who lived three or four years with us, and gave such a deal of trouble that no one had patience with him but

myself, left me a good bit of money in his will. So as I wanted more room, instead of shifting out of this house I added to it, for it's the finest situation in the place. So you shall have this suite—a sitting-room, there, you can see the sunset over the Solent out of that bay-window at the end; and this one opens into a conservatory, that fills up the corner between this and the Belvedere, where the front door is; and here are your bedrooms just behind, open into each other. I have put a bit of fire in missee's; she might be a little chill after her journey, and the gentlemen told me she wasn't too strong. And now you'll have time to dress for dinner at half past six; all my ladies and gentlemen dress for dinner. I have only a small party now, but they are quite elegant people."

Having rattled off this long address with immense volubility, she threw open the bedroom doors, saw to the placing and unstrapping of her guests' boxes, stirred up the fire into a blaze, and with a nod and a smile bustled away. "Well, I declare Mrs. Parker is just the same as ever!" cried Mrs. Miles, beginning to untie her bonnet-strings; "as busy and active, only a trifle stouter."

"It is quite a pretty room," said Edith, looking back into their little salon; "and how much better furnished than our London lodgings!" Her residence with Mrs. Winington had developed a taste for beautiful surroundings, which had been rather a source of suffering lately. "What is that regular, soft, booming, rushing sound?" she continued.

"Oh, that is the sea. The beach is right in front of the garden. I am sure you will be delighted when you are able to look round. Now hadn't you better get ready?"

The party assembled at that intermediate season was but small. Two or three old gentlemen of the respectable vagrant order, accustomed to make a yearly round of boarding-houses and hydropathic establishments, cheap Sybarites, each with a mild hobby; a childless married

couple, and a widow whose family were dispersed, or couldn't endure her interference; a much-traveled spinster, with strong social and political convictions; and a sweet-looking old lady with silvery hair, soft dark eyes, and regular, refined features. She was well-dressed in black silk and black lace and had an air of distinction. Yet there was something timid and dependent about her that touched Edith, who sat beside her at dinner, and showed her sundry little attentions which come so naturally to the young of a higher order.

Mrs. Miles sat opposite, next the hostess, who seemed to have much to say, for Mrs. Miles looked deeply interested in her conversation. Dinner was nearly over before Edith's neighbor addressed her, then she said:

"You have only just arrived, I believe?"

"Scarcely an hour ago."

"I have been here nearly a week, and find the air very strengthening and delightful. You will find the outlook from this house pretty, though somewhat tame."

"I long for daylight," returned Edith, "for I have never seen the sea. I feel quite excited at the thought of beholding it."

This avowal seemed to interest the quiet old lady, and they continued to talk at intervals, till Mrs. Parker gave the signal, and the ladies left the room. Edith paused a moment till Mrs. Miles joined her. On reaching the hall they found the white-haired lady standing at the foot of the stairs, holding one corner of her fine Shetland wool shawl against her mouth.

"I am afraid there is a draught here," said Edith, pausing,

"There is a little. I am waiting for Mrs. Parker who is so good as to help me upstairs every day."

"She has been called away, I think," said Edith, and then added with shy, respectful politeness, "Our room is

opposite; will you sit down there until Mrs. Parker comes? Pray do."

"You are very good; if I do not trouble you."

"There is a nice fire, pray come in," urged Mrs. Miles, and the invitation was accepted.

A little conversation, not too fluent or ready, ensued, and thus a new acquaintance was formed in the outset of this fresh page of Edith's life.

"Well, Mrs. Maitland, I could not tell what had become of you," exclaimed the mistress of the house, coming in some ten minutes later. "It is very nice for you to be comfortable here. I was obliged to run away, for the man had come to speak to me about that carpet they have overcharged for, and I was anxious to settle the matter. I do hope you'll excuse me. Will you come into the drawing-room to-night, ladies? I'm sure Mrs. Miles would enjoy a hand at whist; there's always a couple of tables set."

But Edith and Mrs. Miles preferred remaining in their own apartment, and spent a cheerful evening arranging their belongings.

The next morning was bright and beaming. Edith was up betimes, and soon called Mrs. Miles to share her delight at the view from the window of their sitting-room. A light breeze made the blue expanse of water dance and sparkle in the brilliant sunshine. Some dozen boats of various sizes, with white or brown sails, studded the channel between the beach and the island, which rose, softly rounded and richly wooded, opposite. The tide was high, and a fringe of tiny foaming wavelets played alone the shore with a pleasant, murmuring sound.

"How lovely! how delightful!" cried Edith. "Oh, let us make haste and go out; I long to be down by the sea! You will come with me, will you not?"

"To be sure I will; but I must eat my breakfast first."

"Well, do not be long, dear Miley."

The complete change—the newness of everything—was

of infinite benefit to Edith. The supreme, healthy pleasure she derived from the sights and sounds about her gave her strength and renewed hope. Yet the lesson she had received had taught her the deepest self-distrust. She shrunk from making any acquaintance, and was quite happy with her good friend Mrs. Miles, and Mrs. Maitland, between whom and herself a degree of intimacy sprung up. Mrs. Maitland required much care—care beyond what her maid could give. She loved reading, but her eyes soon grew weary. Edith was heartily glad to read to the gentle, cultivated woman by the hour, and enjoyed the discussions which naturally arose on the subjects of their lecture. On sunny days the invalid crept to and fro on the path between the garden paling and the beach, supported by Edith's arm, and, thus soothed and cheered, grew wonderfully better.

Meantime Edith was not without conjectures as to the possible relationship which might exist between her new friend and the offending Maitland. These had been answered at an early stage of their acquaintance by some reference on the part of Mrs. Maitland to her home at Craigrothie; but even then Edith could not bring herself to mention that she had ever known her son; she had no wish to renew her acquaintance with him or to speak of him. But now and then there were tones in his mother's voice, a peculiar grave, almost sad smile, that brought Jack Maitland back to her memory with a strange pang amazing to herself.

Of Vivian they heard and saw nothing for fully a week after they had settled at Trafalgar House. This was the more extraordinary, as he had engaged a bedroom to be kept ready for his occupation; and Mrs. Parker as well as her guests were quite excited about his coming, as the former had proclaimed him a millionaire of unbounded generosity, and "as handsome a fellow as ever you saw in your life."

He came, however, one warm, thunderous Saturday, when, after growling at the distance most of the forenoon, the storm burst in full force just after he arrived. Edith had been struck by his gaunt and ghastly looks, the dull, sad look of his heavy eyes.

"Have you been ill, David?" she asked, with genuine anxiety. "Is that the reason we have not heard from you, or seen you?"

"Yes. I have had a bad turn this time; an attack of my old fever and ague, but I am all right now. And you are sorry for your uncouth chap of a cousin? I see you are, and that does me a heap of good. You know I have never had any one to care for me."

"Well, I do, David, and I ought; no one has been so good to me as you have."

As she spoke, a blinding flash of lightning, accompanied by a splitting peal of thunder, made Mrs. Miles cover her face with her hands, exclaiming, "God bless us!"

Edith unconsciously clung to Vivian. He with a sudden gesture threw one arm around her, and pressed her closely to him, almost painfully close. The darkness slightly cleared, and Edith, startled, alarmed, quickly disengaged herself.

"I beg your pardon," cried Vivian, confusedly. "I forgot; I believe I was nervous. I didn't know what I was doing. Did I hurt you, little cousin? You are such a delicate creature I ought never to touch you! It's a bad storm for these latitudes, I fancy." He threw himself on the sofa. "When the row is over get me a cup of tea, like a good girl; my head aches still." He pressed his hands to his brow.

As soon as she dared to go out into the passage, when the storm rolled away inland, Edith hastened to fetch the desired beverage herself, placing it with kindliest care on a small table beside the sufferer, and then bathed his brow with eau-de-Cologne, all in so simple and sisterly a fashion

that the most conceited coxcomb that ever believed in his own irresistible attractions could not have misconstrued her.

The storm passed, the clouds cleared away, a glorious evening and magnificent sunset tempted the trio to sally forth. Vivian, who was lavish of his money, without the faintest idea of style or fitness, went off in search of an open carriage, and soon returned. He seemed more like himself—quieter, more cheerful, for the rest of the day. He was kindly attentive to Mrs. Miles, and took no especial notice of Edith. She gradually recovered the uneasiness his unusual looks and manner had aroused, and by dinner-time all things seemed as usual.

The company at Trafalgar House were much interested in the long-expected millionaire cousin, and were somewhat scandalized by his appearing in his favorite costume of black velvet, to which, as the weather was now colder, he had deigned to add a black waistcoat, and, as usual, a tie of brilliant color. He was silent and preoccupied during the repast, and did little to gratify that appetite for the wonderful so common to the ordinary run of humanity.

David Vivian's visit lasted three or four days. He seemed reluctant, yet obliged, to go, and made many promises to return soon.

Edith was ashamed of herself; she felt such a relief at his departure. The curious sort of dread he had at first inspired, and which his kind friendliness had almost banished, revived. His moods had been extremely variable; often he seemed to struggle against some impulse, some unaccountable ill-temper, of which Edith could not help being conscious. Her attentions to Mrs. Maitland roused his wrath. Why should she give so much of her time to a stranger?

"One might think you were paid to fetch and carry for that old woman," he growled, just before starting for London, as he strolled along the beach with Edith. "I believe you would rather read a story-book to her than talk to me."

"But, David, Mrs. Maitland is ill and lonely; I am really of some comfort to her. She wants me a great deal more than you do."

"How do you know that? I have more troubles than *you* know of. Look here, I have a great mind to tell you all about them when I come back; would you care to hear?"

"Yes; I should care very much indeed, dear cousin," she said earnestly. "I should be so very glad to be of the least use to you."

"Thank'ee," said David hoarsely, and he smoked with energy for some moments. "You've a kind heart, Edith, and if loneliness is a claim on it I am lonely enough. Well, when I come back, you and I will cross over to the island and have a nice long day together, then I will tell you my troubles. We won't take Mrs. Miles; she doesn't like the water, and we do not want her. Now, little cousin, good-bye. I mustn't lose my train, for I am due in London—worse luck!—at seven; but I'll come back soon—soon." He pressed her hand painfully hard, and hurried away, leaving her by no means happy at the prospect of a long *tete-a-tete* with David.

All things fell into the ordinary routine when his disturbing presence was withdrawn, and Edith's readings and conversations with Mrs. Maitland grew more frequent and prolonged. She generally spent the evening in her friend's room, as Mrs. Miles deeply enjoyed the gossip and the games of whist in the drawing-room. Being a good-hearted, easy-tempered creature, she was moved by no mean jealousy toward Mrs. Maitland, whose superiority she was shrewd enough to perceive and generous enough to acknowledge.

Although the least inquisitive of mortals, Mrs. Maitland asked her young favorite a few questions respecting her relative, which, though very guarded, impressed Edith with the idea that she was somehow distrustful of him.

"I imagine he has known neither mother nor sisters.

Family life is of enormous importance to every one, but especially to men; they need softening so much."

Edith assented; and as Mrs. Maitland did not seem disposed to talk any more, she took up the book they had been reading and began. It was one of Hawthorne's wonderful romances. Time went quickly; Edith was absorbed in the story.

Without it was a wild night; within the room looked homelike and cheerful. A bright fire and gay chintz hangings, Mrs. Maitland in her easy-chair, Edith in a pretty soft gray dress, with lace about the throat and arms, seated on a low seat, her book on her knees, the lamp on the table beside her, shining down on her graceful head, her earnest, thoughtful face—it was a sweet picture, at least it seemed so to some one who opened the door softly, so softly that for a moment they were not aware a third person was added to their number; then the sudden sense of a disturbing presence made Edith look up—to meet Jack Maitland's eyes.

With a bow and smile to her he went quickly across to Mrs. Maitland, and, exclaiming, "Well, dear mother, how goes it?" kissed her tenderly.

Edith put down her book gently, and had almost reached the door when Mrs. Maitland cried:

"Do not run away, my dear. Let me at least introduce my son to you."

She was obliged to return, and stood with downcast eyes and crimson cheeks, unspeakably annoyed.

"I have already the pleasure of knowing Miss Vivian," said Maitland, with a joyous ring in his tone as he advanced to shake hands with her and then stopped; her attitude, her whole expression, showed she was not going to give him her hand, or to respond to his greeting, beyond what civility required.

"How!—you know Miss Vivian?" asked his mother, greatly surprised. "Why did you not tell me so before?"

"Because until your last letter you never mentioned the name of the young lady who has made your stay here so pleasant and profitable. I have to thank you heartily, Miss Vivian; but I fear you have forgotten me?"

"No," returned Edith, recovering herself, and remembering that it would not do to let her disappointment in him appear. "I was a little startled when you came in so unexpectedly."

"Then you had no idea he was my son?" said Mrs. Maitland.

"I thought it probable when you spoke of Craigrothie, but—" she paused.

"No doubt you had many more interesting topics to discuss," said Jack Maitland, laughing.

He wished to change the subject. He thought that Edith's silence respecting himself arose from reluctance to revert to the mortifying circumstances connected with their acquaintanceship.

"Good-evening," returned Edith, with a pretty, slight, respectful courtesy to Mrs. Maitland. "I have put a mark in the book; you can find the place easily. Good-evening," and with a little hesitation she gave her hand to Maitland.

"If you *will* go," he said, opening the door for her. "I can see my mother is a different creature, and I am sure much of the improvement is due to you."

Edith smiled, shook her head, and escaped down-stairs; but not to the drawing-room. She wanted to be alone. In their own apartment the fire burned clear and bright, and lighted the room sufficiently. Edith sat down on the hearthrug and thought, in a hurried, confused way. "He has come—he is here," was the phrase that repeated itself over and over again in her ears; the man who had thought so lightly of her as to say he had better avoid her evident liking for him. Mrs. Winington was not honest—not altogether honest in her conduct, but she could not invent *such* a story. Was it possible that unaffected, grave, com-

posed man could be guilty of such a piece of boyish coxcombry? Guilty or not, she was almost dismayed to feel so very, very glad to see him. She was angry with herself; it was want of proper pride.

Then the past came back to her, oh, how vividly! All those months since their memorable meeting in the picture-gallery. At her first plunge in the brilliant life to which Mrs. Winington had introduced her, the only one whose presence gave her a sense of safety, of solid ground, was Maitland. She had unconsciously given him her full confidence; and with innocent trust had generally sought for his opinion on all that was said or done, consulting his thoughtful but expressive eyes with the candor of a child.

She could never do this again; Mrs. Winington had extinguished all chance of quiet, unembarrassed intercourse. But since they last met Edith had learned much; she had eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and profited by the repast. She must not allow this consciousness of Maitland's puerile vanity to disturb either her mind or her manners; she must be strong to live her own life, to mark out her own road. Mr. Maitland could be nothing to her; she had much to see and to do apart from him. Indeed, she would resist these unprofitable musings now.

She rose as she came to this conclusion, and looked round for her work-basket. She would take it to the drawing-room, and if Miss Spicer, the locomotive elderly young lady, was not playing whist, she would ask her advice about planning a tour on the Continent. Miss Spicer was a past mistress of the art of doing things in the best way at the cheapest rate. It was contemptible to sit and dream about follies!

The succeeding days, however, showed Edith that in the matter of avoiding Maitland, hers was not the only will at work. He had evidently made up his mind to see as much as possible of her, and his mother seconded him in her gentle, kindly way. Mrs. Miles was soon won over completely.

She quite well remembered Maitland once she saw him again, though when out of sight he slipped her memory.

To Edith, in spite of her resolution to be coldly prudent and steadily distrustful, these days were unaccountably delightful. The hearty gratitude of Maitland for her kind attentions to his mother touched her heart. His sincerity could not be doubted; a great longing to give him her whole confidence struggled within her against a stern determination to show no preference in her manner.

The weather was tolerably fine, and Maitland often took his mother out driving. Edith was always asked to accompany them, and sometimes accepted; but Jack Maitland could not resist the impression that she quietly avoided him. Was it that the associations connected with him were painful? Could she class him with Beaton? Did she think him a poltroon like his friend? or—had Mrs. Winington made mischief? This was possible. As Jack Maitland pondered these things on his way back from a ramble beyond the Eastney Barracks, he caught sight of a certain brown hat and pheasant's breast, which he knew well, and soon overtook.

"Has Mrs. Miles a lazy fit that you are walking alone, Miss Vivian?" he asked.

She looked up quickly, the color rising in her cheek for a moment. How well those delicate flitting blushes became her!

"She is busy writing to her son," replied Edith. "My cousin, Mr. Vivian, has got him a good situation at the Cape, and dear Mrs. Miles is so glad."

"I suppose so," throwing away his cigar. "I did not know she had a son. You expect your cousin down here, do you not?"

"We always expect him; he is a little uncertain."

A pause. Maitland was puzzled how to bring the conversation round to herself and the change he perceived in her manner.

"My mother is not quite so well to-day. I persuaded her to stay in-doors. Will you look in on her when you go in? You have done her so much good; you suit her exactly. In short, if you do not think it audacious of me to mention such a possibility as your growing old, I should say you will, in the course of inexorable time, be just such an old lady as my mother now is."

"That is a high compliment," said Edith, with a pleased smile.

"Still it is difficult to fancy you anything but young—ethereally young. Now do not turn toward the house. It is so fresh and invigorating, though a little wild; the air will do you good, and I want you to explain something that puzzles me."

"What can it be?" asked Edith. "I am not likely to know more than you."

Not wishing to appear ungracious, she acceded to his request, and continued to follow the raised path that separated the road from the beach.

"You must not think me presumptuous; in short, will you grant me plenary absolution for anything I am going to say?"

"Do not say anything disagreeable!" said Edith, looking up entreatingly.

"Do you think *I* would pain you in any way?" asked Maitland, meeting her eyes, the expression in his own thrilling her with a strange, wild delight that had in it something of pain. "Well, I will trust to your understanding me," he resumed, finding she did not look up again or answer. "When I first met you, Miss Vivian, we soon became friends. I could say anything to you, and feel sure of being understood; and I was under the impression that you felt how thoroughly I appreciated the frankness, the delightful sincerity of your nature, in short, that you were inclined to trust me, that you might perhaps, if you needed it, have asked me to do you a service as naturally as you

would an elder brother. Now this is all changed. I can not say where the change is, but you have closed your petals and hidden your heart. Do not tell me that I have no business to question you, that our acquaintance is too slight to permit such a demand. I know you would be right, but I feel too much to submit without an effort. Tell me, has any one spoken against me to you? Why do you treat me as if I were more a stranger than the first day I met you?"

Edith was greatly puzzled how to answer. She could not repeat Mrs. Winington's speech respecting him; she could not otherwise account for the change in herself.

"No one has spoken against you, Mr. Maitland," she said, keeping her eyes fixed on the ground. "I did not think I was so changed."

"Then you *are* changed?"

"I am very much changed—in every way. I feel so much older, so different. It seems years and years since I first met you. I do not intend to be—to be uncivil—"

"I want a great deal more than civility," said Maitland, trying to steal a look into her eyes; "I want as much as I give, as I have given."

"It is growing very stormy," exclaimed Edith abruptly, and turning, she began to walk fast.

Maitland felt checked, but was not a man to be easily daunted.

"When I rushed off to see my mother," he resumed, "full of the warmest gratitude to you for all your tender care of her, and looking forward to the pleasure of renewing our former friendship just at the same stage at which we had been separated by no fault of mine, I did not expect such a disappointment."

"I have read somewhere," said Edith, with a transparent attempt at evasion, "that nothing once broken off can ever be renewed again exactly as it was."

"I am sorry to hear you say so," said Maitland gravely,

understanding that she declined any explanation, and intended to keep up the same indefinable distance between them. "I hoped earnestly that you would not think me less worthy your frank friendliness *now* than you did three or four months ago. I can only accept your decision."

"You are very good. I do not wish to be rude or unkind," faltered Edith, summoning her wounded self-love to sustain her under the load of despair which seemed settling down on her heart as she noticed the effect of her words. Oh! ought she to have believed Mrs. Winington? Was it possible that he loved her—her insignificant little self, and she was repulsing him? Yet how could she explain?

"Rude or unkind," repeated Maitland; "that you could never be. But I need not pain you by compelling you to speak more plainly. So good-bye for the present. You will see my mother this evening, if you can?"

They had reached the gate. He opened it, and raised his hat as she passed through. Then settling it hard down, he turned and walked rapidly away in the teeth of the rising wind.

"Mr. Vivian arrived about half an hour ago, miss," said a servant whom she met in the hall.

Thankful for the timely notice, Edith slipped away to her own room to take off her hat, to think over the hopeless tangle in which she seemed involved.

How could she explain things?—and how could she completely disbelieve Mrs. Winington or believe Maitland? Did not the very spirit of truth seem to speak through the lips of Leslie Beaton? yet at the first touch of disaster how quickly he deserted her. "Still Maitland is faithful and true," said her heart, and she could not turn a deaf ear to the assertion.

As soon as she recovered herself she went into the little drawing-room to greet Vivian. He had quite slipped from her thoughts since Maitland's arrival, and now she felt he

was an additional mesh in the net that was closing round her.

Mrs. Miles was sitting by the fire, knitting in hand, and a somewhat troubled expression on her countenance. David Vivian was striding to and fro, his brow knitted, his hands plunged in the side pockets of his coat.

"How do you do, David?" said Edith cheerfully. "I hope you are better?"

"No, I am not!" roughly, stopping short in front of her; "and you are not well either. You have been crying your eyes out—don't deny it! I see you have. What's the matter, little cousin?—can I not help you?" These last words in a wonderfully softened tone that touched Edith.

"There is nothing the matter, David," she returned, stretching out both her hands. "I have been walking against the wind, and it has made my eyes red and sore."

"Lies! lies!" muttered Vivian to himself, yet taking her hands in his own and letting her lead him to a seat.

"Where does this fellow Maitland come from? how do you know him? I saw you walk past with him, and I watched and watched and thought you'd never come back; but you did, still with him. How did you come to know him?"

"He is a friend of Mrs. Winington and Mr. Beaton," said Edith, dreadfully alarmed and much surprised.

"Ha! traitors every one. He is a traitor too. You must speak no more to him, Edith; I forbid you!"

"Cousin David, I can not be rude to an unoffending acquaintance because you bid me!" returned Edith firmly. "I do not particularly wish to walk or talk with Mr. Maitland, but I will not be forbidden by you to speak to any one!"

"I suppose not! I am of no account in your eyes. I had better go; I am not wanted here."

"Oh, my gracious, Mr. Vivian?" cried Mrs. Miles.

"Really, David, you are too silly," said Edith, with a

pleasant laugh. "You must be hungry and out of temper to make a quarrel out of nothing. Don't you see how foolish it all is? Suppose I were to be angry with you if you walked out with—say Mrs. Parker, or even her daughter—"

Vivian interrupted her with a boisterous laugh.

"Just so, that *would* be a queer turn. Never mind, Edith; I wouldn't walk with a living soul if it would vex you."

"Well, do not vex me by being cross," she returned.

"All right, all right. I suppose I have been making rather an ass of myself. I am a little out of sorts. Don't let us say anything more about it," as if he were forgiving some injury. "Come, sit down, and tell me what you have been about since I was here," and they began to talk in their usual strain.

It had been a most trying day to Edith. She looked forward with infinite dread to dinner; she feared that Vivian might break out with some insulting speech to Maitland. Her cousin's eccentricities seemed increasing; she could not anticipate what he would do next. To her infinite relief, however, Jack Maitland was not at table. He had gone to dine with a former acquaintance at the artillery barracks, and the evening went over quietly.

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"You are home early," said Mrs. Maitland, when her son came to say good-night about half past ten.

"And you are late; I hardly expected you to be still up."

"I have been spending the evening with Mrs. Miles and Miss Vivian. She could not come to me because her cousin arrived to-day."

"Ah! what is he like? What do you think of him?" asked Maitland eagerly.

"I can not quite understand him; and I do not exactly

like him. He was very silent at first this evening; then he burst into talk, and talked well enough."

"Do you think he is more than a cousin to Miss Vivian? Do you think she will marry him?" asked Maitland slowly.

"It is impossible to say. I think not; I hope not. I fancy she is a little afraid of him. Why, what has put that idea into your head?"

"Because—because I should like to marry her myself."

"Yes," returned his mother softly; "I have seen that you love her; I wish she may return your affection. She has exactly the nature that would suit you. She would be a sweet daughter to me. Do you think she likes you, Jack?"

"I can not tell. I thought last spring that if I had a fair field I might have won her, but there was such a rascally plot weaving round us at the time that I was bound hand and foot. I will tell you all some day. Now I feel convinced some one has put her against me. She has changed; she distrusts me. I tried to draw her into an explanation to-day, but she showed a decided objection to enter on the subject. Yet I have a sort of instinctive feeling that she might have loved me at one time." Jack passed his hand over his brow, but the mother's loving eyes caught an expression of pain.

"You love her very much, dear?" she asked tenderly.

"With all my soul!" said Jack emphatically. "But I have lost heart since she rebuffed me this morning. Still, I will hold on awhile longer. I will see her and this cousin together and judge for myself. If there's no hope I will be off home."

"I do not for a moment believe that you will find a rival in Mr. Vivian. I do not think Edith is even glad when he comes. She gives me the impression of being afraid of him."

"Afraid? oh, that can hardly be. Well, good-night. I fear I am not a lucky fellow, except in having such a dear

old mother." He stooped, hissed her affectionately, and went away to his room.

CHAPTER XIII.

LAND AT LAST.

THE day following was comparatively calm. Vivian was peaceable, and listened with some interest to Edith's projects of traveling, and perhaps residing abroad, but evidently considered that he himself was to be of the party.

At dinner he encountered Maitland, who happened to sit next Edith, and did his best to amuse and occupy her, not unsuccessfully, for an inclination to doubt the accuracy of Mrs. Winington's report of his speech respecting herself was forming in her mind—a condition very favorable to her sense of enjoyment, for she was strongly drawn to him.

On Vivian he produced a very different effect. That eccentric personage watched Maitland all through dinner with a scowl of dislike, and when by chance they spoke together Vivian made a point of contradicting him on every point in the roughest and most abrupt manner. Maitland bore all this with unshaken good-temper, occasionally sending a keen, inquiring, anxious glance across the table at his moody *vis-a-vis*.

Dinner over, Mrs. Maitland asked Miss Vivian and her friends to tea in her room, and though Vivian accepted he did not stay long. With a confused apology about having promised some "fellows" to play a game of billiards at the hotel, he said good-night.

His parting glance made Edith uneasy. It rested on Maitland with so murderous an expression of hate and fury that she could not collect her thoughts for a few moments. What danger did it threaten? or was her fancy grown morbid? She felt altogether unnerved, and glad to retire,

though there had been pleasant moments during the evening.

When David Vivian next presented himself to his cousin, he was in a very quiet, melancholy mood. It was after luncheon, and he asked her to come out for a walk. The afternoon was soft, gray, autumnal, and Edith, glad to be able to grant a request of his, at once acceded.

"We will go toward Eastney," said Vivian, as they passed through the porch. "There are not so many people that way."

"Very well," returned Edith, meekly.

"So that fellow Maitland lives in the house," resumed Vivian; "I see him writing in his room."

Edith's eyes followed the direction in which he nodded, and she saw Maitland writing in the window of his bedroom, which opened on the veranda that ran along the front of the house, at either side of the hall door, joining the conservatory at one side, and ending in a screen of glass at the other, which sheltered the windows on this side from the south-east.

"It is nice for him to be with his mother," said Edith, turning her eyes away.

"Very likely," grimly. "Well, I'm not going to stay in the same house. I moved off to the hotel last night; didn't they tell you?—no?"

"You would have been more comfortable here, would you not?"

To this David made no reply, and they walked on almost in silence till they reached a bend in the sea-wall which commanded the view westward, with the Martello Towers in the middle of the channel, and a glimpse of the masts in the harbor beyond.

"Let us sit down," said Vivian, abruptly. "It is not too cold for you, eh?"

"Oh, not at all," returned Edith, who was feeling uncomfortable at this long silence.

"I said I would tell you my troubles when I came next, if you cared to listen," he began.

"Yes, I remember; and I shall be glad to hear them."

"It isn't a story to be glad about," said Vivian. "Well, here goes. I suppose now, Edith, you think I am a quiet, steady, stay-at-home chap?"

"You always seem happy enough with us, and *we* are quiet I am sure."

"Happy!—ah, that I am, if I could always be with you! Now I shall tell you what I really am—a desperate drunkard, nearly a hopeless one!"

"That is impossible, David!" cried Edith, amazed. "Why, you rarely touch a glass of wine; you take only tea or milk, or—"

"Ah, when I am with you. Don't you see, I dare not taste anything strong, or I couldn't stop. Sometimes I keep clear of it for a fortnight or ten days, and begin to think I am cured; then the dreadful, desperate longing for spirits, wine, any thing, comes over me, and I *must* have it, if I tore down walls and murdered men to get at it!" He stopped, and wiped his brow in great agitation. "When I first came over there was a good deal of excitement about your affairs. I got better, calmer, stronger; but after a bit the old craving came back. I have something more to say. Do you remember I once offered to marry you? I didn't care much about it, but I thought it might suit you at the time. Now I want you to marry me for *my* sake. Don't shrink away as if you feared me, Edith. You *must* marry me. I can not live without you. You can save me. If you are with me *always* I shall be able to resist; and I love you, little cousin!—the sight of you is life to me! I have been awfully bad since you came away down here. I had some hard bouts before you left London, but last week I was mad drunk for three days and nights. I gambled, lost a heap of money, went down into hell!" He stopped with a shudder. Edith was speechless.

"Of course," he resumed, "I never came near you until I had got pretty right, but I would not deceive you. It is the one vice of my nature, and it leads to every other. Now you know the worst. Will you be my wife and save me from myself? You don't know what I suffer; the awful horrible thoughts and temptations that keep whispering to me and haunting me, they never come near me when you are by. And I love you—you don't know how I love you! It drives me mad to see other people come near you, even women. I want you all to myself—away from every creature. That Maitland dares to look at you and love you! I'd like to cut his throat! Answer me, Edith. Will you save me, and marry me?"

She was deadly white. She had scarce command of her voice from terror, but she forced herself to reply:

"I never dreamed you wished to marry me, David. I have learned to think of you as a dear brother. I will do everything I can for you—*but* marry you, that I can *not* do."

"What is your objection?"

"In truth I have not the courage to—to marry you, after your account of your tendencies—your difficulties—"

"Then you are cold-hearted, indifferent."

He burst into a mingled torrent of reproaches and entreaties. Edith, though trembling from head to foot, continued tenderly, though firmly to refuse. At last, with a wild, despairing, inarticulate cry, he started up and rushed away toward the open shore where the wall ends, and was soon out of sight.

Edith, though hardly able to stand, hastened in the opposite direction, growing calmer as she went, and at last reached the shelter of her own room, where she described to the astonished and sympathizing Mrs. Miles the trying interview she had just had.

"What will he do?" was Edith's cry. "He seemed quite out of his mind. I am afraid of his hurting himself."

"Oh, no, I don't suppose he will," returned Mrs. Miles, soothingly. "He is odd and eccentric, but I don't think he is so foolish as to do himself any harm. I will get Mrs. Parker to send round to his hotel a little later on, and find out if he has come in. She is a bit huffed about his leaving her house, but she is not an unreasonable woman."

"It is all so unfortunate," said Edith. "Where can we turn? Mr. Dargan seems to have quarreled with you, and Mr. Tilly is so undecided, and now we have lost David! I shall always be afraid of him, though I would give anything to be able to help him. Oh, how my head aches and throbs!"

"Will you lie down? I will shut the shutters and sit by you while you rest. Perhaps you will get a little sleep."

Mrs. Parker's messenger reported first that Mr. Vivian had gone out early and had not yet returned; and on being again sent after dusk, brought word that Mr. Vivian had just come in, and was in his own room.

When Mrs. Parker's guests sat down to dinner, Maitland was much exercised in his mind by the absence of Miss Vivian, especially as Mrs. Miles's honest face showed uneasiness and expectancy. She glanced at the door, she forgot to answer when spoken to, she scarcely eat. He remembered seeing Edith go with her cousin in the afternoon, and he drew the conclusion that they had come to some understanding—or misunderstanding.

Vivian puzzled him, but he was beginning to suspect that he was either a drunkard or an opium eater. Such a relative was a grave misfortune to a girl so unprotected as Edith. He felt strongly impelled to risk everything, and ask her to be his wife.

"Mother, perhaps Miss Vivian will see you?" he said in a low voice as they rose from table.

She gave a little nod of assent, and went round to join Mrs. Miles at the door.

Maitland saw them go out together, and went to his

mother's room to await her report. Her visit seemed to him of portentous length, but she came at last.

"Well?" he said, drawing her chair forward; "well?"

"She is better, and only feared the heat and smell of dinner might bring back her headache; but, Jack, I think she has had a shock of some kind, she is so tremulous and shaken. I am sure the cousin has something to do with it, for Mrs. Miles said when we had left the room, 'If the poor dear had a father or a brother, or any one to look after her; *I* am no good.' I began to say something about her cousin when she exclaimed, 'Don't talk of him; he frightens the life out of her.'"

"That is evident," cried Maitland, much disturbed. "What is best to be done? I am so uncertain of her feelings toward me, I fear to propose. As a rejected lover I should be no use whatever to her; as a friend I might be some help."

"Let us see what a few days may bring forth. I should be greatly distressed if she rejects you, dear son. It would be bad for her as well as you; but I do not think she is averse to you."

Maitland shook his head. "She never gives me the faintest encouragement. We are not even as good friends as we were at first. She has changed greatly, but to me she is more charming than ever. I wish her life were more fortunate."

"*You* will make it more fortunate yet, dearest son," said Mrs. Maitland, lovingly. "We know not what the morrow may bring us."

The morrow brought a climax little anticipated.

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Edith, wearied out, had slept well and refreshingly. A bright morning helped to cheer her, and she began to look upon her distress and fright of the day before as exaggerated and unreasonable. Yet she was still reluctant to let Mrs. Miles leave her. This cowardly feeling she resisted,

as she knew her old friend wished to post a parcel to her son, which she did not like to trust in any hands save her own.

"Oh, yes; go, dear Miley," said Edith. "I am too foolish. When you go I will pay Mrs. Maitland a visit. I think Mr. Maitland is going to the Isle of Wight to-day, and David can not come to her room. Indeed, he was so angry I do not think he will see me. He has probably gone back to London."

"Yes, that is likely enough. Well, if you don't mind, I will go," and a few minutes after Mrs. Miles took her departure.

Edith rang and sent upstairs to ask if Mrs. Maitland was alone, and would like to be read to. The servant brought an immediate acceptance of the offer; so Edith proceeded to look for a book which Mrs. Maitland had expressed a wish to see.

She was standing at a book-shelf, with her back to the French window, opening into the conservatory, when the sound of a footfall made her turn round. To her dismay she saw David Vivian coming through the window, which was as usual open. He must have entered by the door which led into the veranda.

He looked very white. His eyes were bright and wild, but he seemed composed.

"I frightened you yesterday, I know I did," said he. "I have been thinking a great deal since."

"Will you not sit down, David?" said Edith, feeling that a crisis was at hand.

"No; there is no use in sitting down, I can not rest. I must end all this. I shall never leave off drinking; I know it. I shall go down—down. Now I am determined that shall never be. You wouldn't like to see me degraded, eh, little cousin? You wouldn't like me to be mocked and jeered at? No, and it would never do for you to stay behind me. I have thought over all that; I can keep myself

in hand still. I was awfully tempted to finish Maitland as I went by and saw him." A terrible, fierce, wild look came into his eyes. "But I had a duty to accomplish, and I resisted—I resisted! Edith, life is hard on us both. I am chained down by the devil of drink; you are drawn from me, from happiness, by that fiend Maitland. I will deliver us both. Look here!" He drew from his breast a long knife, which he unsheathed, and looked carefully at the cruel, glittering blade, while Edith stood petrified with terror, yet keeping her wits enough to know that any imprudence, any attempt to call for assistance, would be instant death. "This will end all our troubles. I am a sound believer, Edith, in spite of the life I have led; and I know when I deliver you and myself from this fleshly husk we shall be united and happy—no more temptations or misunderstandings, but peace, rest. You mustn't be frightened, little darling; it will not hurt you long. I know the spot in that white, white neck where I can strike and reach your heart in half a second; then I will end my own troubles, and we shall live together through eternity. Don't look at the door. I'd be sorry to hurt you, but *if* you try to get away I will. I will never let you out of this alive." He spoke with incredible quickness.

"I am not going," said Edith, with marvelous, desperate self-control. "I think your plan is a good one, for life is so puzzling."

The unfortunate madman's countenance relaxed. "Ah, that is right. You are true after all; come."

"One thing, however, I must do before—before we die. I promised Mrs. Parker to water the ferns in the conservatory. I can not break my word at such a time."

"Ah, perhaps; yes, you ought not."

"There are two watering-pots; will you help me?"

"Yes, yes; we will get through sooner."

He thrust the knife back into its sheath, and replaced it in his breast pocket.

With agonizing tension of nerve, and in earnest, silent prayer to God, Edith went to a tap near the window and filled one of the watering-pots which hung there, giving him the other. Vivian was soon eagerly at work, while she went to the other side and advanced as rapidly as she dared. If—if only the door into the veranda was open!

"You do not get on as fast as I do," cried Vivian. "I must get more water."

"There is plenty in the tap," said Edith, feeling as if she could hold out no longer.

Vivian turned sharply and went back, talking all the time.

Then Edith stole forward, saw the door was open, and fled wildly through the veranda—not into the house, not to call assistance, but to Jack Maitland's room. She felt sure that the moment Vivian missed her he would rush to wreak vengeance on his supposed rival.

Maitland was writing, as he often did, at a table beside the window, which was open. He was resting his head on his hands, thinking over his mother's advice, and balancing the *pros* and *cons*, when Edith, white as death, her eyes wild with terror, flew into the room.

Maitland started up, his first idea being that she was making her escape from danger or pursuit; but before he could speak she began in frantic haste to close the window, then the shutters, while she kept repeating, "Lock the door—bolt it! oh do, do lock it!"

"What is the matter, for heaven's sake?" cried Maitland. "My dear Miss Vivian, tell me. You are safe with me."

"No—no! I want to save you! He will murder you! Oh, come back into the corner! Do not hold me; I must fasten the door!" Then leaning back against it, exhausted, she went on, "He is mad—quite mad, David is. He wanted to murder me. He was very near murdering you. He will come now; he has a long, keen knife." Here a

step was heard in the passage. Quite beside herself with fear, Edith darted to Maitland and threw her arms around him. "He is coming—he is coming," she whispered, as she clung to him.

"Dearest," said Maitland, straining her to his heart, "you will be ill. Let me take you to my mother. If your unfortunate cousin is mad, he must be prevented from doing mischief to himself or others. You are trembling; you can hardly stand;" and he tried to lift her, but she evaded him.

"I will not let you go," she said, faintly. "He will murder you with that long, cruel knife. I will not let you go."

"Vivian is not coming here," said Maitland; "he would have been here before. Let me take you away; I must know what is going on." Still supporting her, he opened the door. All was quiet, but a distant buzz of talk came from the hall. "You must come upstairs. You shall be safe with my mother. I will see to it."

Half leading, half carrying her, Maitland took Edith with infinite care to his mother.

"She has had an awful fright," he said; "get her some wine. I scarcely know what is the matter, but don't leave her. I shall return when I find Mrs. Miles."

"My dearest child, you are more dead than alive," cried Mrs. Maitland. "Put her on the sofa, Jack."

Edith could not speak. She tried still to hold Maitland, but he, gently kissing her hand, disengaged himself and hurried away.

In the hall he found Mrs. Parker and all the servants talking eagerly. "Oh, Mr. Maitland!" said the lady of the house, "we are all so frightened. Tom here—he is the boy that cleans the boots—about ten minutes ago he saw Mr. Vivian without his hat and a great, long knife in his hand, tearing across the lawn as hard as he could, and looking quite wild!"

"Indeed!" cried Maitland. "What direction did he take?"

"He turned left, and ran straight toward the beach," said the boy. "He seemed to come from Miss Vivian's drawing-room."

"Good gracious! I hope he hasn't hurt the dear young lady," cried Mrs. Parker, fussing away in the direction of her room.

"Miss Vivian is quite safe with my mother," said Maitland, reaching his hat, and sallying forth to see what could be done to capture the lunatic.

* * * * * * *

Mrs. Miles's dismay can be imagined when, on her return, she learned the terrible news of poor Vivian's outbreak. It was some little time before Edith was able to give an account of her hair-breadth escape, or before she could speak to Maitland. She felt certain that in her immense excitement she had betrayed herself. She longed, yet dreaded to see him.

"Do tell me something of my poor cousin," she said to Mrs. Maitland, who was sitting with her in the room to which she had removed, as the association with the other was too terrible.

"I am afraid, dear, his is a very hopeless case. He was found struggling with a policeman and an artillery soldier, who managed to get his knife from him, and they took him to the police station, then to the infirmary. We have written to a friend of his in London, and Jack sees that proper care is taken of him—but—" looking to the door, "here is my son. He will tell you more particulars than I can."

As she spoke Jack Maitland came in, and while he shook hands with Edith, who rose to greet him, his mother quietly left the room. It was a moment of profound embarrassment. Edith scarce knew how to speak or what to say. He, however, soon relieved her of that difficulty.

"I am sorry to see that you have not quite recovered the dreadful shock you have sustained. Your hand is not steady yet," and he held it a moment in both his own.

"I am much better," returned Edith, resuming her seat on the sofa. "But it will be long before I can forget that dreadful day; and my poor cousin David, my heart aches for him."

"Ay, poor fellow, I am heartily sorry for him; but I want to speak of something else—something which concerns the happiness of my life. You must know what it is. I have longed for weary months to say 'I love you, Edith,' and even now I dread lest the avowal may part instead of uniting us, so uncertain am I of your feelings toward myself. I had almost despaired, when something in your fears for me *that* day—something in the clasp of your arms, which has haunted me ever since, gave me a faint hope. My wishes no doubt may have led me to exaggerate a natural humane impulse." He paused, and Edith, half charmed, half frightened, made a little hesitating movement as if to give him her hand, and then drew back. "Ah, you distrust me," cried Maitland. "Why? What is the cloud which has arisen between us? Do be candid with me; do not keep me in the torture of suspense."

"I have been vexed with you," began Edith, with natural sweet frankness, "and I am almost ashamed to say why. But I will tell you. When you went away to Scotland I was sorry. You always seemed true and earnest—a real friend, and I said I was sorry. Then Mrs. Winington told me you were pleased to go—because—because you thought *I* was in love with you and showed it too much." The last words came out slowly, while the pale, delicate face was dyed with blushes.

"It was an infernal lie," burst out Jack Maitland, with more energy than politeness, "invented by an unscrupulous woman. Look in my eyes, Edith, and tell me whom

will you believe—Mrs. Winington or me. I am incapable of making such a speech about any woman."

She raised her eyes to his; then a soft, shy smile broke over her face, and she said very low and steadily:

"I believe *you*."

"Then one difficulty is removed. Now I am so far from so presumptuous an opinion as Mrs. Winington attributed to me, that I am still waiting in infinite anxiety for your decision. Edith, I have loved you almost from the beginning of our acquaintance; can you give me a little in return?"

He held out his hand, and Edith put hers into it.

"Dearest," he exclaimed, drawing her close to him, "put your arms round me as you did the other day and say, 'Jack, I love you!'" He raised her hands to his neck and clasped her to his heart with passionate force. "Whisper it to me, and I will be content."

But he had scarce heard the words softly murmured when a long, fervent kiss stopped further utterance—past, present, and future all merged in that intense moment.

* * * * * * *

So Edith's troubles in this stage of her existence were over. Dargan dared offer no opposition to the marriage—Tilly was glad to get rid of responsibility.

Edith's husband, as nearest of kin, was appointed guardian of the lunatic. He was tenderly cared for, and when his attendants deemed it safe Edith visited him and listened to his long rambling hunting stories.

In all places of fashionable resort the beautiful Mrs. Winington is still admired. She once encountered her old love, who gave her his unqualified opinion of her treachery and falsehood. The interview had an imbittering influence on her temper some time after.

Lady Mary Stanley Brown is a leader of society, and a certain pleasant, lively man about town is her constant attendant, who picks up the crumbs which fall from the rich

man's table; and when the question, "Who was at the duchess's ball, or the countess's garden-party?" is discussed, the list of guests almost always includes Lady Mary Stanley Brown and Leslie Beaton.

But away, in the picturesque glen of Craigrothie, is a quiet peaceful home, where work and play, simple refinement, love, and sympathy make a little paradise as yet untouched, and which, even when the flood arises and the stream beats violently, as they will one day, shall not be shaken, because it is founded upon a rock—the rock of warm affection, of profoundest esteem.

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